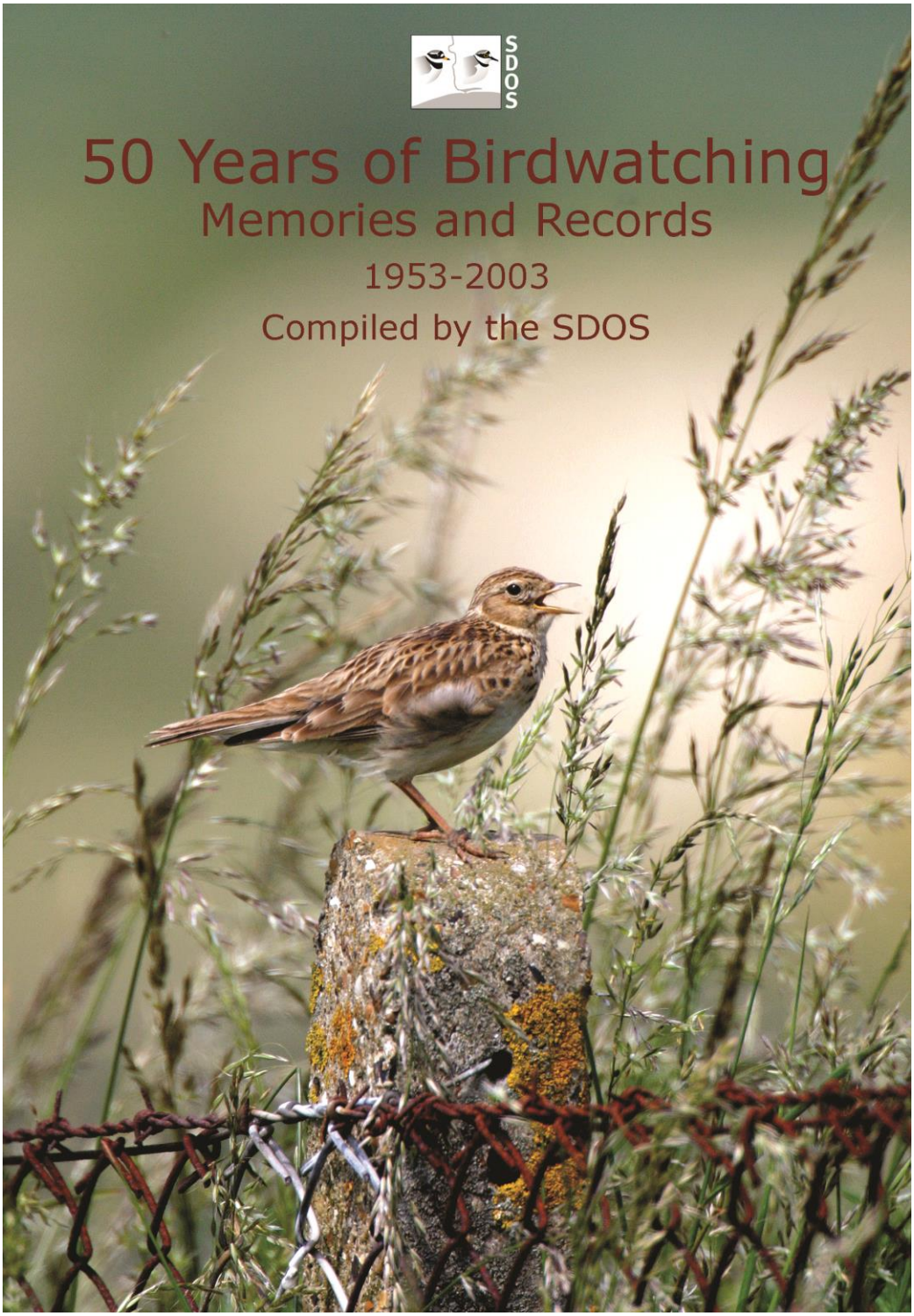
SDOS
50 Years of Birdwatching
Memories and Records
1953-2003
Compiled by the SDOS

1ST Edition published in 2003
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Fifty Years of Birdwatching

Compiled by

Shoreham District Ornithological Society

Editors Terry Hicks and Brianne Reeve

Ringed Plover – *John Reaney*

Acknowledgements

The reason this book has been written is to celebrate the achievements which came from the formation of a small society in 1953. People who were involved from the beginning and in later years have been contacted and were asked to make a contribution. This could be done in many ways, memories of the activities of the Society, favourite sightings, equipment and reference books used or how looking at birds had affected their life. Some people who were only in their teens in the 1950's have since made their mark in the ornithological world.

In 1953 the name was the *Shoreham Ornithological Society* (SOS or ShOS) but later became the *Shoreham District Ornithological Society* (SDOS). This helped to distinguish it from the initials of the *Sussex Ornithological Society* which evolved out of our Society. Many members belong to both the Shoreham and Sussex Societies.

John Stafford was the instigator of the 1953 formation and has encouraged this project from the beginning, suggesting people to contact and ideas for contributions. The book would not exist without his backing..

Illustrations in the form of drawings and paintings have been given by Roger Wilmshurst from his notebooks in the 1950's. The photographs of the Hobby and Black-headed Gull within the book are also his work. The Skylark was the unaminous choice for the front cover. We are very grateful to Roger for all his contributions.

John Reaney has provided many drawings for our Annual Reports and Newsletters in the past and has done new drawings and paintings for this book.

Rob Hume has allowed us to reproduce some of his early drawings which have appeared in RSPB publications.

SDOS logo by Helen Hicks from an original by Richard Ives.

Richard Ives drawings have been taken from past SDOS Reports and Newsletters.

Alan Kitson let us use drawings from his 1962 Notebook.

Judith Steedman and John Stafford also provided studies from their notebooks.

I am very grateful to all these artists for their generosity and for allowing us to share in their talent.

The photographs have come from many sources and are attributed accordingly. Once again I am indebted to all those who supplied negatives, prints and slides. The photographs by Eric Hosking, given to me in 1959, are reproduced by kind permission of his son, David Hosking.

Of necessity this book has numerous contributors and I was delighted when so many decided to record their memories for this anthology Every person has had a connection with the Society over the past fifty years and that was the only criteria for inclusion. But there is always the exception! Rob Hume, Editor of *Birds*, the magazine of the RSPB, has had no connection with our Society but I approached him on the basis of our very strong links with the RSPB from the time John Stafford was on the RSPB Council in 1955. Rob has written a detailed and delightful history of his life with birds and I thank him for allowing us to publish this article.

John Newnham has given invaluable advice throughout this project, quite apart from offering extraordinarily detailed reports on the work at the Sanctuary and on Seawatching.

Richard Porter, who worked for the RSPB in Shoreham for many years and has written numerous books, has been thoughtful with advice, offered not only an article but many fascinating old photographs which add greatly to the special atmosphere of the book. He also introduced us to the charming poems written by J.M.Twort.

Jim Steedman, Peter Whitcomb and Chris Wright have spent many hours proof-reading and I am particularly grateful to them for taking on this task.

My final thanks go to Terry Hicks, my co-editor. He is the one who understands modern

technology and grapples with all the problems. This book simply would not have happened without his expertise and determination Neither of us have attempted to edit anything quite like this before and certainly we did not expect it to be on this scale, but we have both learned a great deal and we can only hope that the reader feels it was worth the effort.

Brianne Reeve Nov. 2003

This picture and the cover, Skylark near the Beeding Cement Works
-Roger Wilmshurst

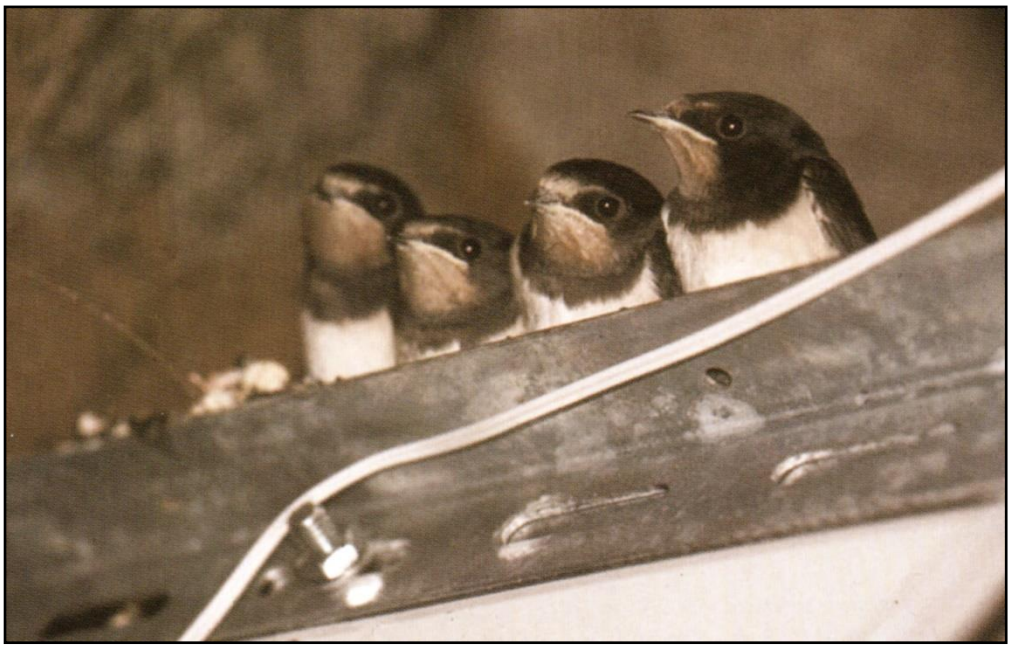
This book is dedicated to John Stafford, a founder and the first President of the Society.

Foreword *Stanley Allen*

"In no part of the animal creation are the wisdom, the goodness, and the bounty of Providence displayed in a more lively manner than in the structures, formation, and various endowments of the feathered tribes. The symmetry and elegance discoverable in their outward appearance, although highly pleasing to the sight, are yet of much greater importance when considered with respect to their peculiar habits and modes of living, by which they are eminently subservient." Thus wrote Thomas Bewick, in 1797, in the introduction to his famous book on British Birds.

And now, 206 years later, we in SDOS (I use the initials not in laziness but in affection), celebrate in this book our 50 years of enjoyment and study of those "endowments of the feathered tribes".

Our Society is in many ways unique; it is based on the ancient small port of Shoreham-by-Sea, though its recording area now extends some way east and west and inland from Shoreham. Its membership has never exceeded 200, but as this book vividly illustrates, it has enjoyed a rich and varied kaleidoscope of birdlife in its area, all this in a spirit where many warm friendships have flourished, and where the enthusiasm and expertise of those men and women who founded the Society those 50 years ago, has been handed down and embellished through the years for the benefit of those of us 'wanting to know about birds'.



Juvenile Swallows – *Stanley Allen*

I can think of no praise enough for those who have made this work come to fruition. Led with dynamic zeal by Brianne Reeve, together with the flair of Terry Hicks and his command of IT, they have brought together a rich panorama which covers all aspects of the Society's work, from members – and others – past and present. I am sure their work will bring much pleasure and delight to all who read this book, whether they are members of the SDOS, or birdwatchers far beyond our town.

Having reached four score years and five, I often ponder on what events, things, hobbies have brought me greatest pleasure; first and foremost of course, my beloved family; then as a schoolboy trainspotting – and cricket (lifelong passion and sometimes not pleasure but heartbreak!); post-war sea fishing; photography; gardens in three homes, and perhaps it was in our garden in Steyning that the love of birdwatching was born, when (and I can picture them now), we had all three varieties of Woodpecker at once on the lawn; the icy winters of the early 60's and Whooper Swans on Beeding levels; and then the joining of SDOS, membership of which has led me from raw amateurism to a fanaticism about birds, insatiable even at my age; and this delightful book will at least atone in bringing back so many memories when these ancient bones cannot cope with the current twitch !

Red Necked Grebe – *Stanley Allen*

Contents

Hobby – *Roger Wilmshurst*

NOTABLE BIRDS

1953 TO 2002/3 *Peter Whitcomb*

The following list shows the more important sightings of significant and rare birds since the formation of the SDOS in 1953.

1953 Puffin unusually picked up dead at Steyning March 4

1954 Chough. Pair nested in a barn at Steyning, probably escapes

1956 White-winged Black Tern. 1 off Hove June 15
Richard's Pipit. 1 on grass by Hove Lagoon Jan 25-29
Tawny Pipit. 2nd for SDOS. Hove Lagoon Sept 10
Woodchat Shrike. 2 immatures Shoreham Tip Sept 12

1958 Bee-eater. 1st and only record for SDOS at Lancing Sept 19
White-spotted Bluethroat. 1 at Shoreham Tip Sept 12-13
Woodchat Shrike. Immature at Shoreham Sanctuary Oct 7-9

Arctic Tern – *John Stafford*

1959 Barred Warbler. Immature, the 1st for Sussex at Shoreham Sanctuary Aug 31

1962 Cattle Egret. 1 at Lancing water meadows Apr 28
Puffin. 2nd inland record at Sompting Dec 5

1963 Common Crane. 30+ in recording area, part of national influx Oct 30-31

1964 Bean Goose. 7 on Wiston Pond March 9-21, the 1st for the SDOS area
Alpine Swift. 1 at Hollingbury Camp Oct 11
Collared Dove. First breeding records of this now very common species

Long Tailed Skua – *Alan Kitson*

1966 Little Bittern. 1 at Steyning mill pond Apr 30-May 5

1967 Yellow-browed Warbler. 1st for area at Coney Hill, Brighton Oct 15

1968 Savi's Warbler. 1st for area, singing at Devil's Dyke Apr 26

1970 Pectoral Sandpiper. 1st record at the Adur Tollbridge Sept 26

1971 Hooded Crow. 1 at Patcham May 31. Another ranging between Cissbury and Chanctonbury Nov 6-14
1972 Gyrfalcon. The only recent record for Sussex in Steyning/Cissbury area Mar 11-22

1973 Stone Curlew. Last known breeding on the Downs

1974 Shorelark. Single Shoreham footbridge from Jan 1 to Feb 4

1977 Black Kite. 1 north over Cissbury May 5
Cetti's Warbler. 1st for area Shoreham Sanctuary Oct 3-7
Raven. 1st record since 1929 Steyning Downs Jan 15

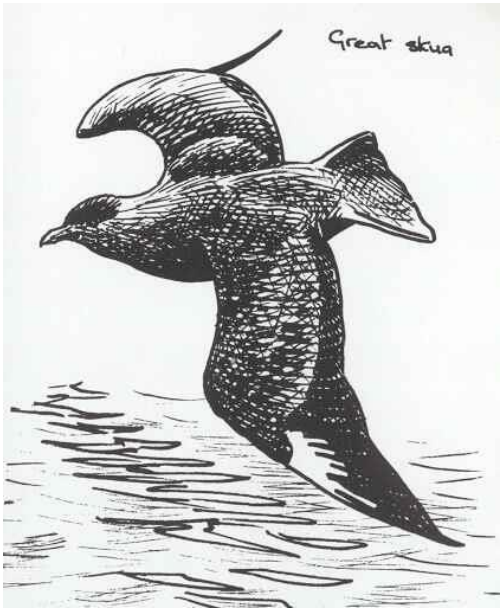
1979 Cory's Shearwater. 1st for SDOS west off Hove April 12
Red-footed Falcon. Immature female Cissbury May 25 to June 1

1980 Sooty Shearwater. 1st for SDOS east past Hove July 30

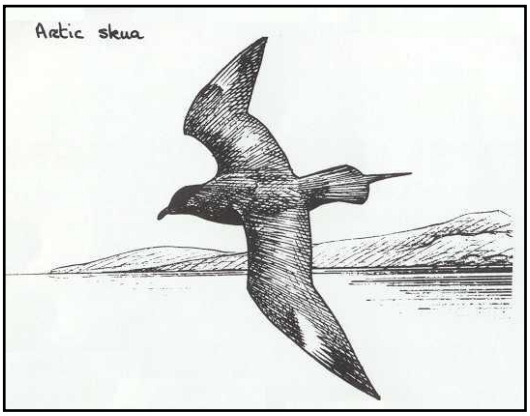
1981 Caspian Tern. 1 off Shoreham July 28
Woodchat Shrike. 1 near Hove June 10-12
Baird's Sandpiper. 1st and only record. 1 adult Widewater Aug 18-19

1982 Black Guillemot. 1 off Portslade beach Jan 7
Wheatear. 1st record of a wintering bird Shoreham Harbour Nov 29 to Feb 1983

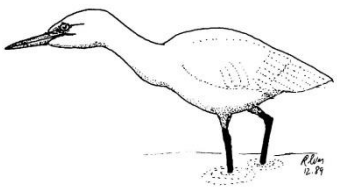
1983 Little Egret. 1st record, but now more widespread. off Portslade May 7



Great Skua – *Rob Hume*



Arctic Skua – *Rob Hume*



Cattle Egret – *Richard Ives*

1984 Snow Goose. 3 adults, 4 immatures in off sea Ferring March 2
Long-tailed Skua. 1st accepted record for area. 1 east off Brighton May 16
Gull-billed Tern. 2nd for area. 1 east off Ferring April 26 (1st was in 1950)
Ashy-headed Wagtail. 1 at Mile Oak May 17

1985 Ring-billed Gull. 1st for area, 2nd for Sussex at Shoreham Jan 11-22 and Feb 9-10
Sociable Plover. 1st year with Lapwing on Downs Oct 31, long stayer moving to Airfield until Jan 3 1986
Whiskered Tern. 1 east past Worthing May 25

1986 White-winged Black Tern. 1 east off Brighton Marina June 21
Little Bittern. 1 at Shoreham Sanctuary June 1-2
Richard's Pipit. 1 at Hove Lagoon June 25-29

1988 Little Bittern. Found at Hove Lagoon Mar 30 and released on Oreham pond to April 12
Night Heron. 1 at Woods Mill May 6

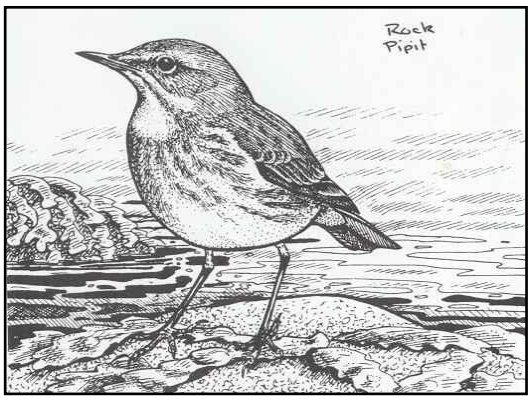
1989 Cetti's Warbler. 2nd for area Adur Recreation ground Sept 6

1990 Franklin's Gull. 1st for SDOS, 2nd for Sussex. Brighton Marina Dec 29
Great Spotted Cuckoo. Immature at Ricardo's, Shoreham Apr 4 into May

1991 Black Stork. 1 west over Cissbury Ring Aug 26
Laughing Gull. 1 adult east Adur Tollbridge Apr 6 to Seaford returning to Widewater

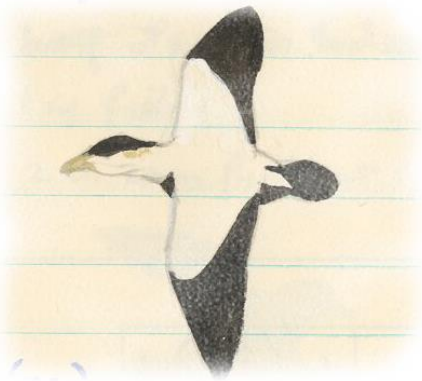
1992 Icterine Warbler. 1 in a Steyning garden May 21

1993 Black Stork. 1 east at Shoreham Sept 16



Rock Pipit – *Rob Hume*

Oystercatchers – *Rob Hume*



Eider – *Alan Kitson*

1994 Pallas's Warbler. 1st for area. Two birds East Brighton Park Oct 22
Radde's Warbler. 1st and only record West Worthing garden Oct 26-27

1995 Little Bittern. Shoreham Sanctuary Apr 5-9
Black Guillemot. 1 around Brighton Marina Dec 23 into March 1996
Rose-coloured Starling. 1 at Coldean Estate, Brighton June 12-16

1996 Caspian Tern. 1 adult off Palace Pier, Brighton May 20

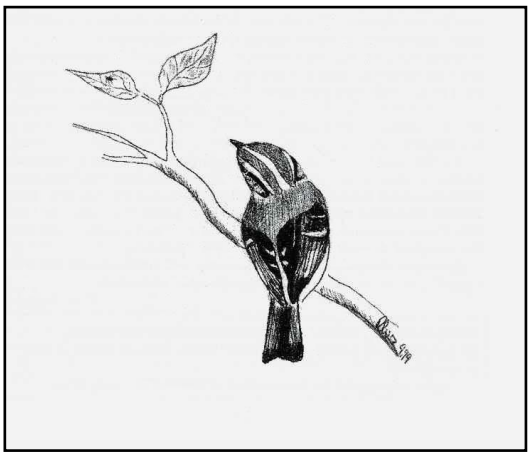
1997 Shorelark. 2 in off sea Brighton Marina Nov 4
Pallas's Warbler. Sheepcote Valley Nov 15-17 and Nov 22-23
Hume's Leaf Warbler. 1st for Sussex East Brighton Park Nov 16-22
Crested Tit. An unusual record in a Worthing garden May 19

1998 Pallas's Warbler. 1 remained in the bushes behind ASDA Marina Nov 18/19
Long-tailed Tit, 2 of white headed European origin Whitehawk Hill Oct 26

1999 Egyptian Goose. 1st for the area, flock of 10 at Steyning Levels Dec 31
Alpine Swift. 1 at Anchor Bottom, Beeding June 7
Whinchat. Latest ever in Sussex at Beeding Hill on Dec 4

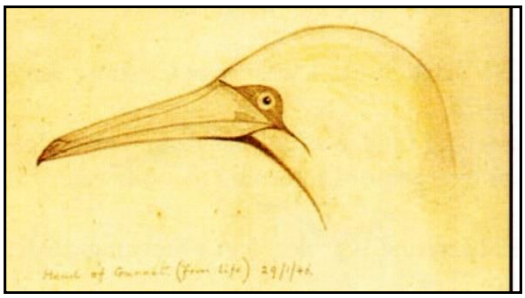
2000 Night Heron. 2nd for area at Brighton Marina and adjacent sites May 12
Great White Egret. 1st for SDOS off Brighton Marina Nov 2
Black Kite. 1NW over Hollingdean June 16
Honey Buzzard. Unprecedented influx. Over 60 recorded in area
Sardinian Warbler. Splendid male, 1st for area Roedean Apr 20/21

2001 Leach's Petrel. 1E at Brighton Marina Oct 7



Pallas's Warbler - *Richard Ives*

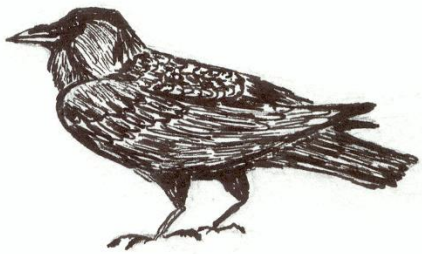
Short Eared Owl – *John Reaney*



Gannet – *John Stafford 1946*

Pectoral Sandpiper. Botolph's field Oct 13
Caspian Tern. 1E at Worthing May 12
Tawny Pipit. 1N over Hollingbury Camp Aug 25
Siberian Stonechat. 1st for area at Sheepcote Valley Oct 16-17
Melodious Warbler. 1st year bird at Sheepcote Valley Aug 18-20

2002/3 Raven 1st breeding for area. Cement Works
Rustic Bunting. Benfield Valley May 10 –11
Lesser Whitethroat East Worthing 1st wintering record for Sussex Nov-April 2003.



Raven – *Judith Steedman*

HISTORY

My father was interested …. *John Stafford*

My father was interested in Natural History and used to take me for walks from quite a young age so almost every Sunday was spent exploring the countryside. I was allowed to collect birds' eggs, just one from each species, all the early birdwatchers collected eggs but wouldn't dream of allowing it nowadays. We would take the Green Line bus out to somewhere in Kent and then do a very long walk using only footpaths back to south-east London trying to identify the birds on the way. I remember holidays having the same kind of pattern, exploring the countryside from the cottage by the sea in Deal where we always stayed in the summer.

At the outbreak of war we moved to Oxshott, a small village in Surrey. There was a wood behind the house where I heard and saw my first Nightingale, I can still recall the pleasure of finding it by myself. By then I was a medical student at the Westminster Hospital in London. The anatomy school was hit by one of the first bombs of the war and we were sent to the centre of Birmingham to continue our studies. I returned to London in 1942 but I had very little time off and no time to look at birds.

I served my National Service in the Fleet Air Arm near Oxford where I had very little to do and was indebted to an Oxford librarian who provided me with books. He suggested I should get to know the classics so I started with Chaucer and read anything he gave me. In 1948 I came to Shoreham as a GP. I realised it was a good place to see birds with the seashore, a tidal estuary and the Downs to the north so I could pick up my hobby again. I used to walk along the beach sea-watching and if I found any dead birds I would take them home to stuff them, I had taught myself taxidermy in my youth from a book which I still possess. At one time I had about forty birds which I had collected or been given and then stuffed.

I tried to find a local Natural History Society with a bird group in it. Brighton and Hove had no bird section, there was one at Horsham but it was small, not very active and

anyway eighteen miles away, prohibitive in those days.
Then two things happened . We kept chickens in our back garden in a wired-in coop and runway (eggs were still rationed and scarce). One day I discovered a strange medium-sized bird in the runway desperately trying to escape, to my astonishment I realised it was a Corncrake, before releasing it I photographed it . I am always surprised how unusual birds manage to land in the garden of a birdwatcher!

The 1952 Corncrake – *John Stafford*

The second thing was that one day soon after that I walked up the little bye road off the Steyning road (A 283) just past the Toll Bridge. I came to a fence which enclosed a copse and water meadow with a small stream. As I stood thinking what a superb habitat for birds, a man came out of the padlocked gates and I was told the area belonged to Brighton Corporation and housed a water pump driven by an oil-fired motor which sent water into two nearby reservoirs. The man lived on the site and he obviously took pride in the condition and performance of his machinery.
I wrote to Brighton Corporation to ask their permission to go in and look at birds in this protected area. Their reply was friendly and I was told to make myself known to the man I had spoken to, Mr. Weatherhead, and he would give me any help I needed. I visited the area frequently often taking some of my home-made traps to see which birds were in the area. It was a perfect place undisturbed by man or cattle, with a small copse, a pool and a stream, a real haven for birds. Later on access to the copse was by climbing down the very steep west side of Mill Hill and entering through a small gate, you needed to be keen to tackle that slope!

In the early fifties birdwatchers were few and far between so one day when I saw a man with a telescope propped up on two crossed bamboo poles, staring out over the mudflats, I went to talk to him. This was my first meeting with J.M.Twort who lived in Southwick. He told me about Miss Kitty Biggs who lived up on Mill Hill and was a keen birdwatcher. Also about this time I started to write a short weekly article for the Shoreham Herald mentioning birds seen in the area and I put forward the suggestion of forming a local bird society.

As a result of all these events a meeting was held in 1952 at Miss Biggs's home with J.M.Twort, F. Severs, G.W Rampton, T.Kermode (from Lancing College) and myself. It was decided to form the Shoreham Ornithological Society to study and record the birds of the area. We planned to have a talk each month during the Autumn and Winter and have field outings with a leader in the Spring and Summer. To everyone's surprise, at the end of 1953 we had forty-four members!

As the Society grew I became more involved with ornithology on a wider scale. I was asked to serve on the Council of the RSPB and was Chairman of the Education and General Purposes Committee. The Natural History Museum was in charge of the ringing programme and I had been ringing for them using various traps. Then when mist nets came in from Japan the BTO asked if I would use mist nets for catching birds in our Sanctuary (the area I had found before the Society was formed). The RSPB asked for volunteers to warden Havergate Island off the Suffolk coast and it was there that I met Eric Hosking when he came to photograph the Avocets. This led to a long friendship with Eric and I joined him as the doctor on some of his expeditions to Spain for the Lammergeier, Bulgaria and Finland, in the company of such erudite birdwatchers as John Ash, Bruce Campbell, James Ferguson-Lees, Johnnie Johnson, Phil Hollom, Guy Mountfort and George Shannon. They were exciting times and I had some truly memorable birdwatching experiences.

It has been a privilege to see the Shoreham Ornithological Society earn respect in the birding world and to know that some of those very early members of the Society are still teaching others the pleasures of birdwatching. I am amazed that it is still in existence after fifty years!

From the Beginning 1953-1986 *John Stafford*

(Text Taken from "The Birds of Shoreham" 1988)

At a first glance this part of the Sussex coast, with extensive urbanization between Brighton and Worthing, would seem to be an area neither attractive nor rewarding for bird watching. A closer look reveals a variety of habitats, which attract a good range of different species. However, in 1948 when I came to live here there were no natural history societies that concerned themselves with birds. The Horsham Natural History Society, with a small bird section, was the nearest but eighteen miles to the north, and at Eastbourne, thirty miles to the east, a similar Society met. The Brighton and Hove Natural History Society, although the closest, had no bird section. The few notes and records of birds from this area appeared in the South Eastern Bird Report, which was started in 1934 by Ralph Whitlock and continued in 1948 by Grahame des Forges. D. D. Harber then joined des Forges for a few years before editing the journal alone as the Sussex Bird Report until it was taken over by the Sussex Ornithological Society on its formation in 1962, and so it continues. In the early days there were few or no observers to cover the important Adur estuary, part of which is now an R. S. P. B. reserve, or the Downs either side of the Adur Valley as most bird watchers were in the east of the county. A few others and I felt that

Shoreham needed a society to allow like minded people to meet, talk about birds and to pass on information. During 1952 a few tentative meetings were held until, in January 1953, the Shoreham Ornithological Society was launched. By the end of the first year the membership reached forty-four. Meetings with a guest speaker were held during the winter months and field outings with an experienced leader arranged throughout the year. An annual report was published and these activities have continued ever since. At first the area covered by the Shoreham Ornithological Society was very local, but over the years its range has slowly become more widespread. A rough geographical distribution of the membership, in five well spaced years, reveals clearly a spread of the membership away from Shoreham.

The Shoreham old Toll Bridge – *Richard Porter*

The membership increased to a peak of 180 in 1971. At that time the meetings, then held in the Huntington Hall, were packed so it was decided to limit the membership to 180. It is interesting to reflect how many junior members were active in the Society in the 1970s. At least 30 young members were present in 1962 forming a stark contrast with the one solitary individual in 1986.

The distribution of the bird records undoubtedly reflected the areas where members lived and bird watched, and the reports in the 1950's were mainly of sightings in and around Shoreham. However, it was not many years before records from the areas near Worthing and Brighton, particularly from the downland north of these towns, were included in the Shoreham Ornithological Society annual report. The area now recorded by the Society includes Ferring Rife to the west, Brighton Marina to the east and Steyning to the north. Although the Society still meets regularly, has field outings and produces a report there have been a number of changes in its activities over the years. The meetings in Huntington

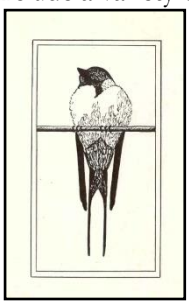
Hall finally ended in 1976 and after meeting for three seasons in the Shoreham Community Centre, often with the background of another group's Saturday evening dance, the Society has settled to meeting in St Giles Church Hall in Shoreham by Sea. Between 1958 and 1976 the Town Hall in Shoreham was the venue for the Society's annual showing of RSPB films; these were well attended in the early years and provided useful revenue for the Society, but by 1976 the audience had decreased dramatically, so it was discontinued. Throughout the Society has been run by an excellent committee with some members serving for many years. Without their dedication and enthusiasm the Society would never have been started nor have flourished. Ironically the largest crisis which faced the Society was in 1981 when several council members retired simultaneously. This coupled with a rapidly falling membership and diminishing funds led to an Extraordinary General Meeting which may have led to the Society being wound up. Fortunately, new people with new ideas were forthcoming and the Society has strengthened again.

Down river from the Shoreham Foot Bridge – *Richard Porter*

Since 1981 the name has been changed to the Shoreham District Ornithological Society in recognition of the wider geographical spread of its membership. As previously mentioned the information gathered from both members' records and more systematic studies have been published in an annual report. As the Society has evolved so the report has changed. In 1953 a thin 14 page document was produced, by 1960 there were 32 pages, 52 in 1970 increased to 70 by 1980 and one report in 1986 was 92 pages in length.

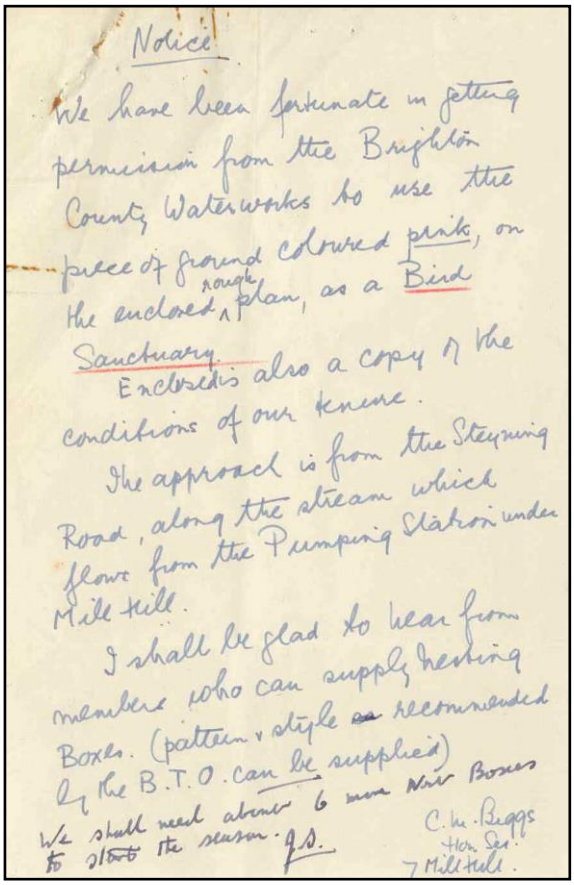
The cover too has changed. Between 1953 and 1958 a Swallow adorned the cover, an attractive Kingfisher on a bright orange background appeared in 1960, but the design of a Great Black-backed Gull by Gerald Sutton was used between 1961 and 1980. The cover changed again in 1981 to show a Ringed Plover. The most dramatic change during the 1980s has been helped by the availability of some of the advances in microcomputer technology.

This has allowed the editor to plan the report more precisely, present the ever-increasing number of records more clearly and include a variety of sketches, graphs and maps.



Original Report Cover – *SDOS Archives*

Perhaps the most important step taken by the newly formed society in 1953 was the acquisition of a bird sanctuary and ringing station on land belonging to the "Brighton Water Board". It is a small copse of about three acres situated on the east side of the Adur Valley, about half a mile north of the Toll Bridge and below the slope of Mill Hill.



Notice

We have been fortunate in getting permission from the Brighton County Waterworks to use the piece of ground coloured pink, on the enclosed rough plan, as a Bird Sanctuary.

Enclosed also a copy of the conditions of our tenure.

The approach is from the Steyning Road, along the stream which flows from the Pumping Station under Mill Hill.

I shall be glad to hear from members who can supply nesting Boxes. (pattern & style as recommended by the B.T.O. can be supplied)

W/e shall need about 6 more Nest Boxes to start the season. G.S.

C. M. Biggs
Hon. Sec.
7 Mill Hill.

Copy of a notice from Miss Biggs – *SDOS Archives*

The copse is mainly of Willow, Hawthorn and Elder scrub through which a stream passes and drains onto the nearby water meadows. Near to but apart from the copse, was the house and garden of Frank Weatherhead, who at that time was the resident engineer who maintained in the pump house an immaculate, coal burning, steam driven water pump. When the reservoirs were full the excess water ran over a concrete ledge, making a miniature waterfall, which drained away, into a stream, thus forming a very attractive area for birds. Over the years, with an increasing population on the south coast, a need arose for a greater supply of water.

The Sanctuary looking down from Mill Hill 2002 - *Terry Hicks*

In 1972 the steam pump was replaced by a more powerful electric one and water was taken from deeper boreholes. Thereafter the small springs in the copse became dry and the excess water only flowed over the waterfall during the winter. Mr Weatherhead retired in 1965 and Tom Santer became the resident engineer. Soon after this the lease for the Sanctuary was changed extending the area of the "reserve" to include the southern portion of the copse. Furthermore the access, which wound its way down the steep side of Mill Hill, had become impenetrably overgrown and the water authority then allowed the Society to use the private waterworks road. In 1981 Willie Schultz became the tenant in the cottage and "guardian" of the pump station following the retirement of Mr Santer, but the Society's amicable arrangements with the water authority have remained unchanged.

Observations were started and we began to record the birds that inhabited and visited the area. It soon became apparent that this moist habitat attracted migrants, both in the spring and the autumn passage, whilst in the winter the scrub provided a roost for thrushes. A national scheme for bird ringing had started and was organised by the British Museum (Natural History) to be fully taken over by the British Trust for Ornithology at Tring in 1954. The Sanctuary was then the only ringing station in Sussex with Portland Bill in Dorset and Dungeness in Kent being the two nearest ringing sites. In 1955 the copse was

fenced off in an attempt to keep out the cattle, which disturbed the nesting birds and caused general havoc in the area.

Heligoland Trap – *John Stafford*

Two years later a Heligoland trap was built on an ideal site to the north of the copse where there was a small pool that rarely dried out. However, soon after it was completed I was asked by the B.T.O. to try out a "mist-net". These nets originated from Japan where they were used to catch birds for the pot. Originally they were made from long strands of human hair but now synthetic fibres are used. Mist nets revolutionised bird trapping and sadly the Heligoland trap fell into disuse but not before it had caught several new species, one of its specialities being the Water Rail.

Barred Warbler - *John Stafford*

On 31st August 1959 an immature Barred Warbler was caught and ringed, this was the first record for Sussex. To begin with a modest two hundred birds a year were ringed. By the 1970s however, the annual total often exceeded two thousand. In 1961 a hut was built in the copse to store ringing apparatus and to keep a log book to be filled in by visitors to help with the records of birds seen.
At the ringing station many young people learnt to ring birds. Now it has become necessary for all ringers to be trained and then issued with a permit from the B.T.O. to ring birds. Almost every year a new species was caught or seen in the Sanctuary area.

The ringing station at the Sanctuary – *John Newnham*

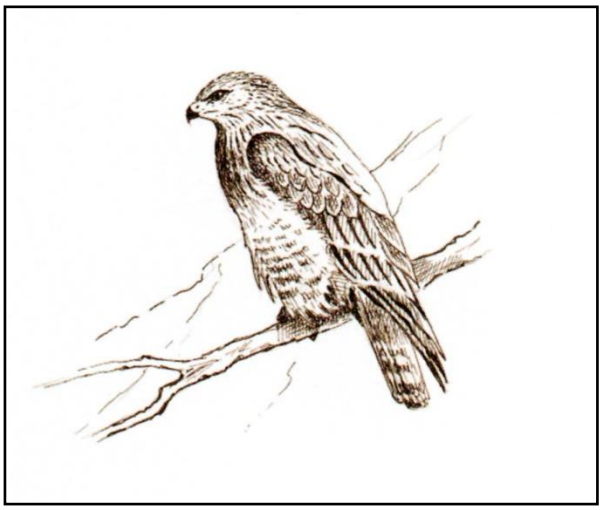
Despite the alterations to the habitat partly induced by the draining and partly by the natural succession from low scrub to areas of mature trees the area is still good to watch birds. Even the construction of the A27 Adur flyover between 1967 and 1970 caused far less disturbance than was expected, the road and approach roads being very close to the Sanctuary. Though not manned on a regular basis it is visited mainly in the spring and autumn and in the winter if the weather allows as the water meadows are liable to extensive flooding. Up to the end of 1986 one hundred and forty seven species had been recorded in this small area. As well as looking after the Sanctuary the Shoreham District Ornithological Society has in recent years been involved in conservation issues involving sites like the River Adur and its mud flats, Ferring Rife and Widewater.

An extract from a booklet written in 1967 *Charlie Grigg*

My memories of Steyning would not, I think, be complete without some reference to my interest in ornithology. I have kept records and made rough notes for more than 60 years

and have referred to these to refresh my memory of the bird life in and around the town. The late John Walpole Bond, who was one of the greatest authorities on the birds of Sussex, states in his History of Sussex Birds that 112 species nest regularly in the county. Of this number I have, over the years, definitely identified 95 species that have actually nested within easy walking distance of Steyning. There is no doubt that the various types of territory available serve to attract many different sorts of birds and this is amply borne out by the following list of some of the species that have nested in this area since I was a boy.

Stone Curlew	Collared Dove	Tree Pipit
Wheatear	Water Rail	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
Wryneck	Heron	Grey Wagtail
Hawfinch	Wood Lark	Grasshopper Warbler
Cirl Bunting	Quail	Sparrow Hawk
Hobby	Crossbill	Woodcock
Long-eared Owl	Kingfisher	Nightjar
Red-backed Shrike	Wood Warbler	Stonechat
Great Spotted Woodpecker	Corncrake	Goldcrest
Yellow Wagtail	Nightingale	Tufted Duck



Buzzard – *John Reaney*

Several of the birds listed have only nested on rare occasions, but I think it is safe to say, from my own observation, that upwards of 60 species still nest regularly in the neighbourhood of Steyning, although, I am sorry to record, in rapidly diminishing numbers. My interest in birds is well known locally and any uncommon bird in the district is usually brought to my notice in one way or another. Some of them have been brought to me to identify after being found dead or badly injured. But I am happy to say that it has been my good fortune, at different times, to have seen most of the birds listed below in their wild state in the countryside around Steyning.

Montagu's Harrier	Buzzard	Common Crane	Rufous-Necked Weaver
Short-Eared Owl	Red-crested Pochard	Redstart	Whinchat
Marsh Harrier	Ring Ouzel	Waxwing	Firecrest
Bewick Swan	Whimbrel	Cattle Egret	Squacco Heron
Black Redstart	Snow Bunting	Little Tern	Golden Plover
Hen Harrier	Cape Shelduck	Puffin	Hooded Crow
Night Heron	Great Skua	Brambling	Tree Sparrow
Spotted Crake	Hoopoe	Gadwall	Sarus Crane
Peregrine Falcon	Great Grey Shrike	Curlew	Pied Flycatcher
Little Bittern	Chough	Greylag Goose	Common Sandpiper
Redwing	Fieldfare	Wood Sandpiper	White-fronted Goose
Siskin	Teal	Wigeon	Rough-legged Buzzard

Whinchat – *Keith Noble*

This list is a most impressive one of birds actually recorded in the district. Many of them were undoubtedly passage migrants while others were winter visitors that have occasionally remained in the neighbourhood for several days. One or two had possibly escaped from a zoo or an aviary, but it is difficult to explain the appearance of a Great Skua, a Puffin and a Little Tern all of which were, at different times, found dead less than a mile from Steyning and all in the same locality.

In 1952 a Chough was seen in the vicinity of Mouse Lane and in 1954 a pair built a nest in an old barn; seven eggs were laid, but unfortunately the nest was destroyed. These rare cliff-loving birds must have escaped from an aviary although it is difficult to visualise anyone who would wish to see them in captivity. The Collared Dove is a bird that is rapidly extending its breeding range westward from Europe and is now resident in this country. It was first seen in Sussex in 1958 and a single bird was seen in Steyning in 1963. In 1965 however a pair certainly nested in the district as I saw a young bird accompanied by two adult birds on May 1st of that year. One of the strangest visitations of uncommon birds occurred on October 31st, 1963, when a flock of Common Cranes was seen quietly feeding on some freshly ploughed farmland near Wykeham Dale Farm, little more than a

mile from the town. These birds were apparently only a part of a considerably larger "siege" of Common Cranes that for several days received a great deal of publicity in ornithological circles. One can only wonder what mischance brought them to England where they had not previously been seen in comparable numbers for more than 300 years.

Common Crane – *John Reaney*

Of all the new birds that it has been my good fortune to watch in their natural surroundings near Steyning none have given me greater pleasure than the Stone Curlews that at times can still be seen on the open downlands. As far back as 1900, W. H. Hudson in his book Nature in Downland stated most emphatically that these birds had been "extirpated" from the Sussex Downs. This statement was, I am glad to say, far from true. I was shown my first Stone Curlews nest in 1902-just a shallow scrape on the bare ground-and since then I have seen these rare birds year after year and found their nests. That they are far less numerous than they were, is unfortunately true, but they have adapted themselves wonderfully well to the changes brought about by mechanised and intensive cultivation. The driver of a machine cannot be expected to see the two eggs whose colour blends so well with the bare ground on which they are laid, but I have known men who have spotted the bird leaving its eggs and have stopped their machine in order to mark the nest with something conspicuous so that it could be avoided the next time that strip of ground was cultivated. Looking through my rough notes I am reminded again and again of days when, in company with my son, we watched the Stone Curlews in their summer haunts on the Downs above Steyning. It was always an achievement when we found a nest and on several occasions we found two in one day, but it was from watching the behaviour of the birds themselves that we derived our greatest pleasure, although the whole of the surrounding scenery lent itself to our enjoyment. In the autumn the Stone Curlews flock together prior to migration and we counted no less than 42 of these birds on Park Brow on September 16th, 1934. The earliest nest we ever found was on April 10th, 1936, and the last time I found one was on May 13th, 1963, but birds were again heard calling near their old haunts in 1966. Many of my most treasured memories are associated with days spent in company with my wife and family wandering through the woods and fields and over the hills near Steyning. There was always so much to be seen off the beaten track and we were all keen birdwatchers. It is fitting therefore that this small book of memories should be rounded off with these records of a hobby that has given us so much pleasure in days gone by.

Memories of my father, Charlie Grigg *Joan Lucking*

My father's happy hunting grounds were Calcott's Woods and French Lands and the top of the hills above Steyning: No Man's Land, Park Brow and Stump Bottom. As children we walked all over Park Brow with him looking for shards of Roman pottery and pot boilers. In the Spring it was Stone Curlews we watched for and always found their nests. I remember under Chanctonbury Ring seeing men getting Plovers' eggs. They worked the field with a rope between them and then watched for the birds to leave their nests, dropping the rope to mark the spot. I suppose the eggs were sold to someone like Fortnum and Mason's. The Long-eared Owl nested in Stump Bottom where we would see it perched on a low elder tree. My father showed us Shrikes' larders and knew where we could gather hands full of wild raspberries.

Out in Calcott's Woods finding a Nightjar was one of his great joys. We children were more interested in flowers and butterflies. I remember in particular a meadow full of Early Purple Orchids and the excitement of finding the Greater Butterfly Orchid and Oxlips in the woods. The Purple Emperor butterfly always out of reach in the tops of sapling oaks. Green Hairstreaks and White Admirals on the blackberry blossom later in the summer.

Nightjar - *John Stafford*

We had fourteen Yellow Wagtails on our lawn at The Den in Coombes. I remember my father saying, when the Brooks were drained we wouldn't see them again. He said they nested in the tussocks and those all went when the Brooks were ploughed.

We had a Sarus Crane across in the Brooks once but I think it must have been an escape, we heard its most weird, ventriloqual call. There were also several Whooper Swans one winter and a Hoopoe in the spring in our garden, pecking around on the lawn with a group of Starlings. Redstarts used to be constant visitors and my father was very excited once as he saw a Black Redstart. One year too, I remember excitement over a Chough out under

the Ring. Also, Hobbyhawks nesting in the pinewoods under the Ring towards Washington.

Our garden in Steyning, now the Community Centre car park was a gorgeous hayfield when my grandfather Grigg bought it (probably about 1925) and pheasants and partridge nested there. The most wonderful flowers came up in their due season – they were remnants of the original garden.

THE SHOREHAM SANCTUARY

50 years of activity *John Newnham*

"*Perhaps the most important step taken by the newly formed society in 1953 was the acquisition of a bird sanctuary and ringing station……"* wrote Dr John Stafford in his chapter describing the formative years of the Society in *The Birds of Shoreham* (1988). A bold and innovative move by the fledgling Society to promote the study of common birds such as Blackbirds and Greenfinches. Fifty years on the "Sanctuary" is still used very much as intended in 1953. Miss Catherine Biggs, then the secretary for the Society and living on Mill Hill near to the proposed reserve, negotiated excellent terms with the Water Board of Brighton Corporation and secured the bird sanctuary. Although the name of the owning body has changed several times over the half century the lease has remained similar to that at the outset and the Society has enjoyed a good relationship with the water authorities. This review looks at the site, the changes which have taken place, the people involved and some of the studies and changes in the wildlife of the copse, and is based on the annual Sanctuary reports which are acknowledged below, and some of the author's personal memories.

The site, habitat and its changes.

The Sanctuary is a small copse situated at the Shoreham Pumping Station on the eastern edge of the Adur valley below Mill Hill. The area comprises about three acres of mainly hawthorn, elder and willow scrub interspersed with streams and small pockets of reedbed. In 1953 the scrub height was about 10 feet with plenty of light and space. Until 1972 small springs emerged in the copse providing fresh water which drained into a network of small streams and finally flowed into a single, large dyke which wound its way westward across the flood meadow towards the River Adur. During the summer months these meadows were grazed by cattle whilst in the winter they were often flooded. The main stream itself emerged from the pumping station as surplus water flowed from an open pool, over a small weir and into this stream. On the east side of the copse is the steep slope of Mill Hill, in 1953 it was mainly coarse grass interspersed with small scrubby hawthorns. North and south were fields mainly used for cattle or sheep pasture.

Over the years the habitat has, of course, changed with all the scrub species growing and evolving. The report for 1977 notes the encroachment of sycamore both into the copse and on the surrounding hillside; this process has continued, so extensive sycamore woods now cloak much of the hillside and several single trees shade the copse. For the last three decades the hawthorns have created a dense canopy inhibiting the development of any

undergrowth. Perhaps the most profound effects however, have come from changes in the surrounding land use and within the pumping station itself. In 1968 the work on the Adur flyover started, which not only involved the construction of the bridge and re-routing of the roads, but also entailed the cutting of a steep sided valley through Mill Hill. The landscape changed dramatically and eventually the project was completed in the spring of 1970. However, the meadows south of the copse had been replaced by access roads and the peace of the Sanctuary had been substituted for a constant drone of traffic noise. Within months of the completion of the A27 construction, further work commenced to replace the pumping station; this was more disruptive to the ringing activities in the copse and a large chalk and soil mound accumulated in the Sanctuary. The new pumping station was finally completed in 1971 and the garden re-landscaped with the removal of the open pool and planting of ornamental Weeping Willows and Silver Birch. The new pumps were very efficient at drawing water from the deep springs to accommodate the demands of the growing urban population and consequently the freshwater springs ceased flowing and, during the summer, the main stream dried out. The ornamental planting was fine initially but, in the damp environment the willows grew rapidly and by the 1990s had grown above all the other trees in the copse whilst most of the birch were removed in the mid 1990s to provide space for further engineering developments to improve the monitoring of water quality.

Whilst changes in the copse undoubtedly made a difference to the bird life so also did alterations in the surrounding land use. In the late 1970s cattle ceased grazing the surrounding meadows and the land was leased for horse pasture. Horses also grazed the portion of hillside near the Sanctuary and within a few months the steep sided slopes had been denuded of vegetation. Furthermore, in 1984 a new dyke was created on the north and west side of the copse with the aim of draining surplus water from the fields more efficiently. The dyke provided boundary security for the copse where fences had previously failed. However, its steep sided profile coupled with annual dredging left no shallow, muddy pools to attract birds to bathe and drink.

Initially the access to the copse was either by taking the footpath across the water-meadows from the main Steyning Road or taking a well worn path down the hillside from Mill Hill. A small gate locked with a small "Squire" padlock, the keys for which could be purchased from the Hon Secretary, marked the boundary of the Sanctuary and the same key granted access to the ringing hut. By 1972 these routes were no longer practical and the current pedestrian access along the waterworks road was negotiated. As security at the pumping station became stricter, so more gates and locks were added, and eventually by the mid 1990s access to the copse had become quite restricted.

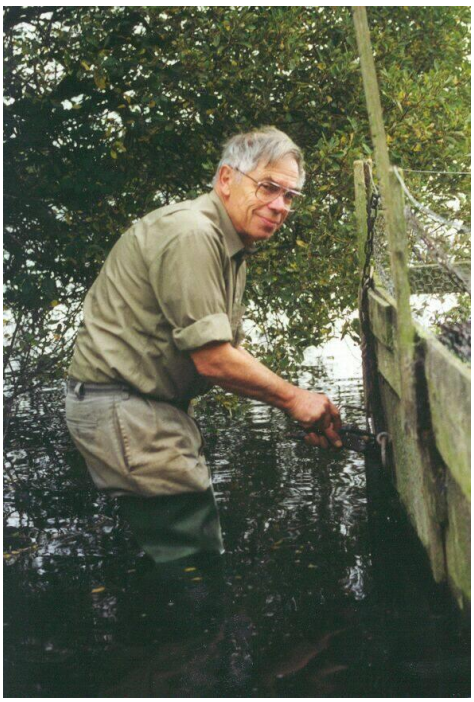
Until the mid 1980s the grounds of the pumping station were kept in immaculate shape with the lawns being regularly mown, the flower beds carefully tended and the shrubs regularly pruned. Gradually many of these tasks, which were the responsibility of the resident engineer, were offered out to contractors and by the late 1990s there were abundant signs of neglect as the lawns remained unmown and the gardens overgrown.

The people

Most of the activities at the Sanctuary have revolved around the ringing activities so it is no surprise that most of the people visiting the copse have been the area's ringers. John Stafford initiated these activities and trained a small group of ornithologists who themselves have gone on to teach others. Amongst the early students were Tony (BAE) Marr and David Stone. Tony ceased ringing at the Sanctuary about 1960 and went on to become a county, and later, a national ornithological celebrity. David, often accompanied by Andrew Gagg, continued ringing at the copse until the mid 1960s when he moved away to study and finally relocated in the Midlands.

In 1960 Michael Goddard started his training as a ringer. Michael lived on Mill Hill (opposite both the Stafford and Biggs' households) and soon became the most active of the ringers at the Sanctuary. It was Michael who, as a close school friend at Steyning Grammar School, was most influential in steering the author's interest towards birds and ringing. Michael continued ringing at the Sanctuary during the 1960s but by the end of the decade he was spending more time at university in Swansea and after his graduation he moved away from the Shoreham area eventually embarking on a teaching career in Kenya. The ringing log in the mid 1960s included the handwriting of two other pupils from Steyning Grammar School, Colin Hitchman and Chris Leach, who occasionally visited the Sanctuary to help with the ringing and in 1969 both Colin Messer and Brian Clay had started training under Michael Goddard's guidance.

Dr Barrie (AB) Watson joined Dr John Stafford in medical practice in Shoreham during the 1960s; and, as an active ringer he was soon contributing to the local ringing as well as continuing his interest with Chichester Ringing Group. The reports suggest he first ringed at the Sanctuary in 1966 and since then has been very involved in the ringing, ringing tuition and maintenance at the copse. As the senior ringer he took over the role from Dr John Stafford as the trainer. The mixed variety of species trapped at the Sanctuary made this an ideal site for ringing tuition. Amongst the many who have learnt ringing skills from Dr Barrie Watson at the Sanctuary include Phil Clay, now leading the activities of the Steyning Ringing Group, and Stephen Rumsey, who, with his work at Elms Farm, Icklesham and his promotion of studies in Senegal, has become one of the world's most successful ringers.



Barrie hard at work – *Barrie Watson*

In 1973 the author graduated from Edinburgh University and returned to live in Sussex, initially in Shoreham but later in Brighton before moving to Worthing in 1977. Since then most of the ringing in the Sanctuary has been organised by him. Many have helped over the past thirty years. During the 1970s the helpers included Dr

Mark Wright, a medical doctor from Brighton, and Ann Taylor (now Mrs Ann Scott) who was working for the RSPB local office. In 1981 Judith Baker started her training and later moved to Tring to work with the BTO. Judith soon returned to Sussex as a teacher and, in 2002, remains as a regular ringer at the Sanctuary. During the 1980s another teacher, Phil Turney, came ringing at most weekends and was always a stalwart at keeping the paths cleared of nettles. Martin Banks, Lysbeth Muirhead, Roy Hughes, Michael Prince, Len Mayhead and Bill Woodford all consistently featured in the ringing log during various parts of the 1980s and the initials of two younger "Watsons", Jane and Margo, started to appear next to ringing notes. In the following decade John and Charlie Holt spent some time ringing in the copse, Val Bentley made an occasional visit and, in the late 1990s, Sarah Dawkins expanded her ringing experiences in the Sanctuary.

Much of the work to maintain the copse, repair the bridges and keep the paths cleared was, and still is, undertaken by the "Sanctuary Committee". The first declared committee comprised Messrs A Burstow, W McKechnie and T Palmer. The author readily recalls meetings at the copse with these revered gentlemen. Alf Burstow, invariably on his bicycle, was full of encouragement to the younger members and Tom Palmer, the Society's recorder, often visited the copse during the spring in the company of two other senior society members, Joseph Twort and Frank Severs. As junior members of the society the young ringers present always respectfully addressed these seniors as Mr ……. and forenames were never used. The committee trio was joined by Frank Forbes in 1971. Frank was frequently found in the copse clearing paths or planting more osier to provide cover for warblers. By 1973 both Brian and Phil Clay were regularly visiting the copse and they too were drafted into the committee and in 1978 the committee comprised Dr Barrie Watson and the author, a state which remains in 2003.

A Sanctuary work party, with Stanley Allen in the foreground clearing some branches from the open water – *John Newnham*

Cyril Helyer, an active member not previously mentioned, visited the Sanctuary regularly during the 1970s; he maintained a regular log of his sightings and in 1979 updated "The Botany of the Sanctuary" finding an additional 64 species (and missing nine) to the listing produced by Colonel WR Roberts in 1954. Cyril frequently called in during the morning ringing sessions and if the birding news was quiet then other topics of conversation often evolved from Cyril's occupation as a pharmacist at the Royal Sussex County Hospital where the author worked for three years during the 1970s.

No article on the Sanctuary would be complete without mention of the resident engineers who lived in the cottage, tended to the pumping station and, until recent years, cared for the gardens. From the outset Frank Weatherhead was the incumbent and following his retirement in 1965 the position was taken by Tom Santer. Both worked hard to run and maintain the old coal fired, steam driven, water pump. John Nixon briefly held the post before the last engineer, Bill Schultz, moved into the cottage in 1981. Although Bill Schultz retired from employment in the 1990s he remained in the cottage until January 2002. All have taken an interest in the wildlife of the copse and always been most helpful despite being frequently disturbed and awoken early on weekend mornings during the summer and autumn months.

The activities

Some of the first tasks were to secure the site and in 1953 notice boards were erected on the north side as a footpath passed close by the copse. The labour intensive task of fencing the copse started and was completed in 1955. Alas repairs were constantly needed as cattle from the neighbouring fields regularly broke through. In 1955, Mr G.Rampton, then Treasurer, presented the Society with a number of large railway sleepers which were valuable components for building bridges across the numerous streams running through the copse. Several are still functioning in the 21st century; a testament to their strength and durability.

One of the largest undertakings was the construction of a Heligoland trap on the north side of the copse by a small pool which rarely dried out. This was a large wire mesh funnel into which birds were channelled and eventually extracted from a small catching box at the narrow end of the funnel. These traps were (and still are) encountered at bird observatories in windswept and barren sites such as Dungeness. The author has fond memories of hours sitting on the grass bank overlooking the "Heli" waiting to flush any birds coming to drink in the pool into the mouth of the trap. The trap caught many different species and was particularly adept at catching larger birds such as Moorhens and Water Rails. The life of the Heligoland trap was, sadly, rather short as it was frequently inoperable due to flooding and was badly damaged in winters with heavy snow falls. Furthermore the small pool dried up, the hawthorns started to grow in and through the trap and by the late 1960s the last few birds were trapped in the Heligoland trap. The advent of the mist net, coinciding with the completion of the trap in 1957, undoubtedly hastened its demise.

In 1956 a small hide was built but this was a rather "dilapidated and makeshift affair" and was replaced in 1961 by a smart ringing hut bought from some of the profits of one of the Society's showings of RSPB films at the Shoreham Town Hall. The ringing hut not only

acted as a shelter and hide, offering a good view of the centre of the copse, but also a useful store for a daily census log book and various bits of ringing gear, in particular a long spring balance. The inside door of the locking cupboard on which this spring balance was attached was covered with innumerable pencil sums to work out the true weight of the birds being measured. The hut was regularly repaired and used until the early 1980s by which time the nearby hawthorn had completely enveloped the structure. It finally collapsed and perished in the hurricane of October 1987. By 1969 the growth of hawthorn and willow had nearly reached the power cables running over the Sanctuary; contractors were employed by the Electricity Board to cut a massive corridor through the centre of the copse. The change was stark but regeneration occurred quickly which inevitably led to this becoming a regular exercise. The thrush roost, already in decline by 1969, finally deserted the copse after the first cutting. Similar, but less drastic, work was also required in the parts of the copse used for mist-netting and during the 1970s most of this maintenance was easily managed with a small hand-saw and plenty of energy. As the task grew a number of working parties were arranged and in the 1980's up to 15 members joined forces to help clear and burn areas of the overgrowing Sanctuary and, for a period, the event was a regular feature in the Society's diary. A series of very wet winters making access impossible, coupled with falling attendance, led to this ceasing to be an annual event. Nevertheless work continued and in the winter of 1996 much was done with the help of Bob Antonini (and power saw) who re-opened the centre of the copse and cleared willow on the west side to promote the generation of a reed bed.

Throughout the 50 years the Sanctuary has been used as an area to promote interest and education in wildlife with a particular emphasis on ornithology. The site has been used to encourage and train ringing and from the outset Dr John Stafford was involved in this education with many trainee and fully fledged ringers visiting or learning new skills at the Sanctuary. Regular Society outings to demonstrate ringing have been arranged; these were not always very successful but in 1967 a cracking male Pied Flycatcher was caught and in 1972 both Spotted Flycatcher and Turtle Dove were demonstrated in the hand. During the late 1970s and 1980s many other groups including Natural History Societies, RSPB members groups and school parties from as far away as Angmering and Crawley enjoyed visiting the copse and in 1979 a group from John Selden Middle School in Worthing returned to help at a "gardening" session as their way of expressing thanks.

The wildlife

Table 4 (page 46-48) lists the 155 species of birds noted in the defined recording area of the Sanctuary; most expected species appear on the list and new species are added at a slow rate. In 1953 the report noted 78 species, in 1954 the total was 86 but few subsequent reports have made such statements. By 1978 the total list was 130 (Newnham, 1978) and by the end of 1986 (*Birds of Shoreham*) the total was noted as 147. Since the publication of the *Birds of Shoreham* eleven species have occurred for the first time but two, Greylag Goose and Twite, have been removed as a review of the reports suggest these were erroneously included in previous listings.

Breeding birds of the copse were studied well in the early years and during the 1950s between 23 and 26 different species bred annually. According to the report for 1954 a pair of Tree Sparrows were the first to have bred in West Sussex since 1880 and Cirl Buntings

bred nearby. The copse regularly hosted breeding Nightingales and one adult returned to breed in the four years between 1958 and 1961. During the first two decades of observations species such as Grey Partridge, Turtle Dove, Stonechat, Grasshopper Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher were recorded breeding. In the 1990s these species were seldom seen and certainly did not breed. Detailed studies of the breeding birds in the copse were undertaken in both 1981 and 1983 (Baker, 1981 and 1983) which, in a more restricted area, showed 14 species in 1981 and 18 species in 1983. Baker compared the results from ringing studies with the territory plotting methods used by the Common Bird Census and in 1981 she found 35 breeding territories whilst ringing details suggested 49 breeding pairs. Breeding Reed Warblers and Blackcaps have been studied in detail, the former with a colour ringing programme, and some fascinating aspects of their biology has been learnt. Both species have shown fidelity to the site with individuals returning to breed for up to six seasons.

The annual reports contain many interesting statements and records, particularly when read in the context of expectations in the year 2003. Some of the early notes of migrants include seven Wood Warblers recorded in the spring of 1954 and up to five Grasshopper Warblers heard together in 1957. In 1969 the sighting of a Sparrowhawk was noted as extraordinary and some of the counts of finch and bunting flocks in the 1960s and 1970 make the numbers in the 21st century seem mediocre.

Table 1. Bird Species (sub-species) only recorded on one occasion in chronological order (1953-2002).

Great Grey Shrike	Oct-53	Wryneck	Aug-76	Common Tern	May-88
Red-legged Partridge	???-55	Ring-necked Parakeet	Oct-77	Great Spotted Cuckoo	Apr-90
Hoopoe	Aug-56	Cetti's Warbler	Oct-77	Short-eared Owl	Oct-93
Woodchat Shrike	Sep-56	Hen Harrier	Jan-79	Osprey	Jul-95
Red-backed Shrike	May-57	White-fronted Goose	Feb-79	Little Egret	Aug-96
Ringed Plover	Sep-57	Merlin	Oct-79	Raven	Dec-96
Nightjar	Sep-57	Marsh Harrier	May-80	Sandwich Tern	Aug-99
Barred Warbler	Aug-59	Abietinus/tristis Chiff-chaff	Nov-81	Dartford Warbler	Oct-99
Marsh Warbler	Sep-61	White Stork	Apr-82	Red Kite	May-00
Shelduck	Apr-64	Ortolan Bunting	Sep-85	Mediterranean Gull	Mar-02
Quail	Mar-67	Yellow-browed Warbler	Oct-85	Nuthatch	Jul-02
Rough-legged Buzzard	Nov-74	Glossy Ibis	Sep-86		

Table 1 shows the species which have only been recorded on one occasion and contains the records of the rarer species recorded. Little Bittern, recorded in both June 1986 and April 1995, is the only rare species excluded. Several of those recorded since 1990 are species which have recently colonized or returned to Southern England. The Barred Warbler (Stafford, 1959), Marsh Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, grey raced Chiffchaff, Ortolan Bunting, Dartford Warbler and Nuthatch were only recorded by virtue of being trapped. Most of the other records involved birds flying over the copse or recording area although the Quail in March 1967 was noted to be calling from the centre of the copse, the Yellow-browed Warbler was initially heard calling on the hillside but later watched feeding in the withy and the Great Spotted Cuckoo was the well watched individual which usually frequented the scrub near Ricardo's but was seen on several occasions in the fields near the Sanctuary.

The White Stork was compensation to members attending an annual ringing demonstration at which no birds were trapped! The past reports have published notes on unusual birds which failed to be identified; a small, speckled plumage crake with a short bill swam across one of the streams and disappeared into the undergrowth in December 1981 but, perhaps the greatest miss of all, was in November 1975 when the author paid scant attention to a pale, small and rather tame curlew with no head markings (Stafford and Newnham, 1975). Although rare and unusual species are interesting most of the observations at the Sanctuary have been on common birds. Although these studies have been conducted for the past half century the detailed records for the early years are not available. Therefore most of the following is based on a shorter period. Much of the work has been involved with ringing and whilst considering results from these studies it is important to be mindful of many potential biases in the data.

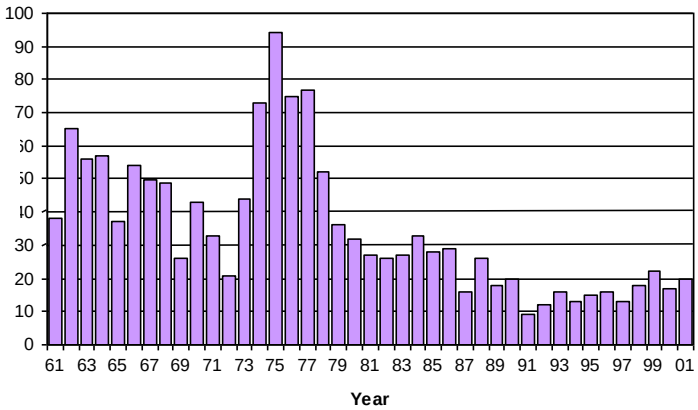
Although ringing at the Sanctuary has been continuous since 1953, the effort has not been constant and past annual reports have described some of these changes. Initially traps were used but even after the Heligoland trap had been constructed and mist nets were introduced the amount of netting used was small. The author recalls ringing sessions at the Sanctuary in 1963 and 1964 when a single 60 foot mist net was placed in the centre of the copse and one or two 20 foot nets were set where most birds seemed to be.

One of the streams running through the Sanctuary – *John Newnham*

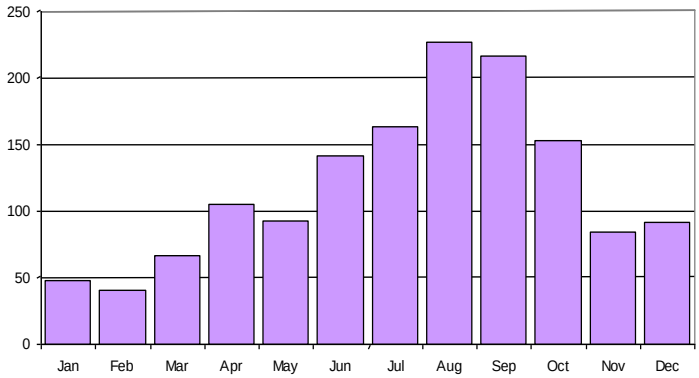
By the late 1960's sufficient equipment was owned for several regular sites to be used and since the early 1970s the same mist-netting has been erected at each session. This still does vary slightly depending upon factors such as weather and the availability of sites but several mist-nets are still positioned in the same rides as were used in the early 1960s whilst others have been forced to change considerably. The following plot (Figure 1) shows the variation in effort since 1961, by both year and month, and reveals a tenfold range between just nine sessions in 1991 and 94 sessions in 1975. Similarly August and September are considerably better represented than the winter months when short daylight hours limit opportunity, and access is frequently restricted by winter flooding.

Figure 1: The ringing effort (1961-2001) showing the number of sessions a) in each year and b) in each month

a) Number of ringing sessions



b) Number of ringing sessions



Additional bias in the numbers of birds trapped has been caused by the use of either tape-lures or food baits to attract birds. These activities have been fairly limited at the Sanctuary, however during the mid 1970s peanuts and suet were supplied which enhanced the trapping of tits and, when possible, tape lures have been used to trap autumn passage House Martins. This species is, therefore, amongst the most numerous ringed at the Sanctuary but, where appropriate, birds trapped by luring have been removed from the figures.

The view of the Sanctuary from the west – *John Newnham*

Figure 2: The annual ringing totals (excluding House Martins) (Red); species trapped (Violet) and birds per ringing session (Blue) at the Sanctuary 1961-2001

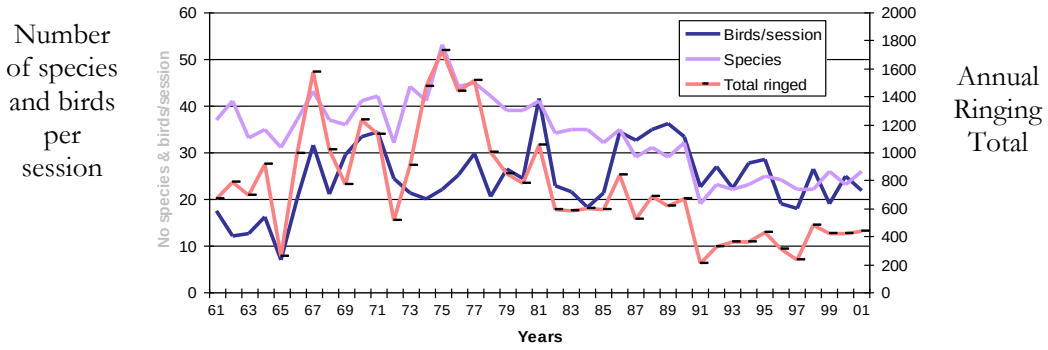


Figure 2 shows that the annual total of birds ringed (black) reached a peak in the mid 1970s, steadily declined until 1991 since when approximately 400 birds have been ringed a year. For the most part the lower numbers ringed are a reflection of the ringing effort as the number of birds caught per session (pale grey) has not varied much. Of interest, however, is the variety of species trapped which is illustrated by the mid-grey line which has fallen from between 30-40 in most years to nearer 25 different species in the last decade.

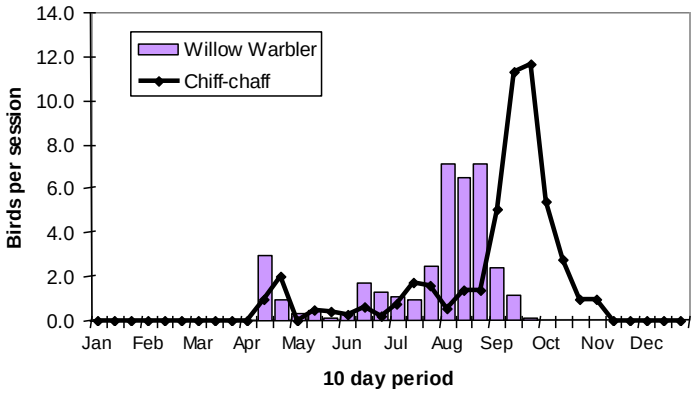
John Newnham with the mist nets in the Sanctuary – *John Newnham*

The damp and lush habitat of the Sanctuary has been attractive to all the common species of warblers and this group comprises nearly 27% of the birds ringed. The results from ringing at the sanctuary have shed some light on the passage of this group through Shoreham.

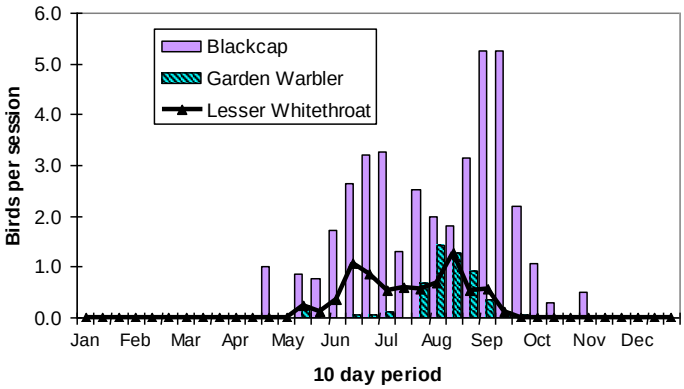
Wright and Newnham (1977) described the passage of Willow Warblers through the copse and showed that males arrived earlier in spring and in larger numbers than females whilst in the autumn equal numbers of each sex occurred. The same paper showed the precise timing of this passage with the spring peak in late April whilst that in autumn was in mid-August. This pattern was shown in Figure 24 in *The Birds of Shoreham,* then utilising 13 years data between 1974 and 1986, and compared the timing of passage of both common *phylloscopus* species. This showed Willow Warblers to be more numerous than Chiffchaff. The following figure (3) redraws the graph but using data from the 15 subsequent years.

Figure 3: The average numbers of a) Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs b) Blackcaps, Garden Warblers and Lesser Whitethroats trapped per ringing session in each 10 day period (1987-2001)

a)



b)



The most startling difference is the lack of a large spring peak. This, in part, is related to reduced ringing activity in April but observations have continued during this period and

these suggest the copse now fails to attract warblers until later in the spring. The August pattern shown for Willow Warbler is similar to that for the period 1974-86 but without a clear mid-month peak and, surprisingly, in view of this species decline (RSPB, 2000: Gregory *et al*, 2002), reaching the same average of about seven birds per session. The pattern for Chiffchaffs however shows this species to be more numerous with the September peak reaching nearly 12 birds per session; over double that shown for the period 1974-86. The Chiffchaff is a species enjoying a long-term increase in numbers (RSPB, 2000: Gregory *et al*, 2002) and tends to prefer the more mature woodland which is now developing at the Sanctuary.

Figure 3 also draws the same plot for three *Sylvia* warblers and this too can be compared with Figure 23 in *The Birds of Shoreham.* There seems to be little change in the occurrence of both Lesser Whitethroat and Garden Warbler with a mid August peak still reaching an average of only one or two birds per session. Blackcaps however have become more numerous with higher numbers of breeding birds and progeny caught during the summer months and a small increased average catch during their peak passage in September.

Linnet - *Keith Noble*

Another group of common birds which have changed dramatically over the life span of the Society are the sparrows, finches and buntings. For several years the decline of these species has caused concern and in the mid 1980s Leverton (1988), using ringing information from the Sanctuary, Beachy Head and his ringing site near Lewes, showed declines particularly in Greenfinches and Goldfinches. However, these two species, along with Chaffinch, are the only three in this group which are not showing national, long term population declines (RSPB, 2000: Gregory *et al*, 2002). The loss of Tree Sparrow, Linnet, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer and Corn Bunting has been recognised by placing

them on the "red list" due to serious negative population changes. All these species were once regularly ringed at the Sanctuary but no Tree Sparrow has been trapped (or recorded) since 1983, the last Linnet was ringed in 1990, the same year for the last Reed Bunting, which had been absent for the previous nine years also, and the last single Corn Bunting was ringed in 1991.

At one time House Sparrows were considered so common that they were not ringed and the large flocks at the Sanctuary posed a problem as they "filled" mist-nets and so reduced the nets ability to trap more interesting species. No such "problem" has occurred for the past two decades and House Sparrows are now seldom seen and never trapped.

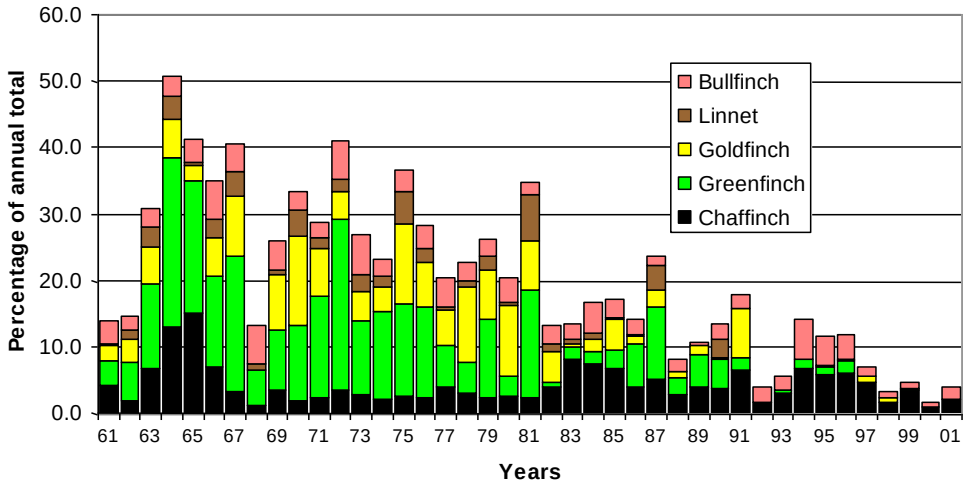
Marsh Marigolds in the Sanctuary – *John Newnham*

Even the once common species have shown notable declines and these are shown in Figure 4. At first sight this appears a "busy" figure but it shows several features quite clearly. The overall trend for the group is a decline from between 20% and 50% of the total birds ringed in the mid 1960s until the early 1970s to less than 5% in the late 1990s. Only Chaffinch (black), despite fluctuations has remained throughout this period. Up until the mid 1990s Bullfinches (pink) remained fairly steady but these, in line with national findings, have not been trapped so regularly in the last five years.

The marked declines at the Sanctuary, however, are in the other three species shown in the figure. Greenfinches (green) were once amongst the most regularly occurring species, being found at most times of the year and often in large numbers. Indeed with nearly 2900 ringed, this species remains the second most numerous species ringed in the period 1961-

2001. The figure shows between 8.5% and 26% of the birds ringed at the Sanctuary in the mid 1960s and early 1970's were Greenfinches whilst since 1991 just 22 have been ringed with 5 blank years.

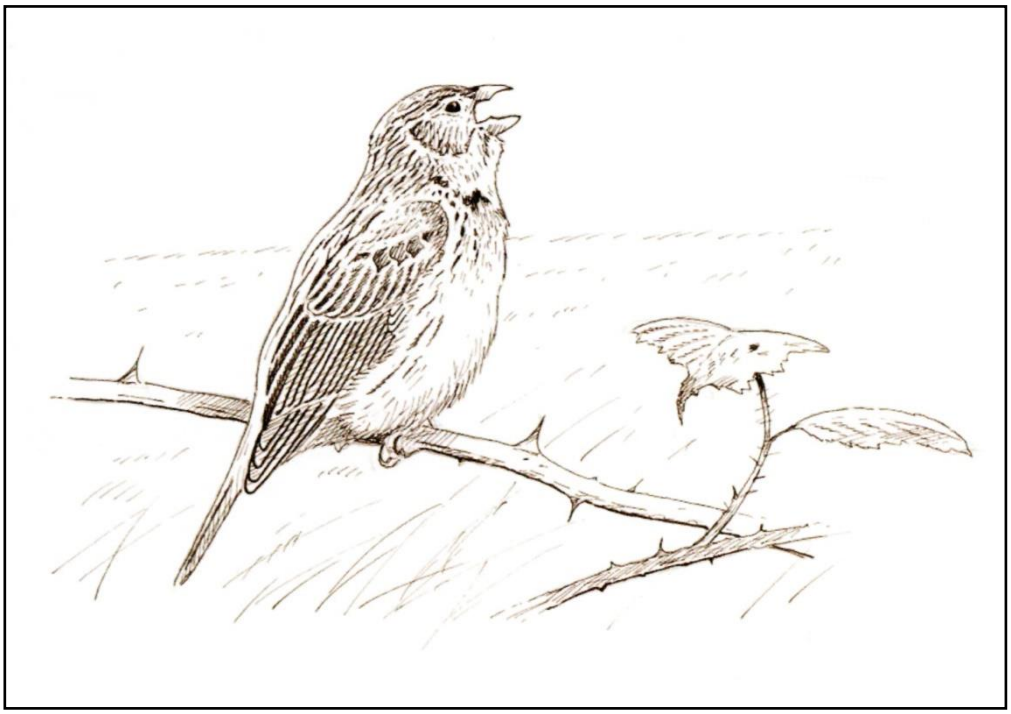
Figure 4: The proportion of the annual ringing totals (presented as a percentage) for five common species of finches (1961-2001)



Goldfinches (yellow) and Linnets (brown) too were once regularly caught, mainly in the late summer and autumn, when charms were feeding on thistledown and weed seed on the hillside and surrounding fields. Parties would regularly come into the copse to rest and drink from the springs and stream. In 1978 a flock of 300 Goldfinches, associating with 200 Linnets and 260 Corn Buntings, was present for some weeks. Wright and Newnham (1978) presented some observations on Goldfinch ringing at the Sanctuary from 1955–1978 and showed the numbers of Goldfinches caught fluctuated wildly but showed a general trend of increasing in line with the Common Bird Index of the time. Since 1991 only seven have been trapped.

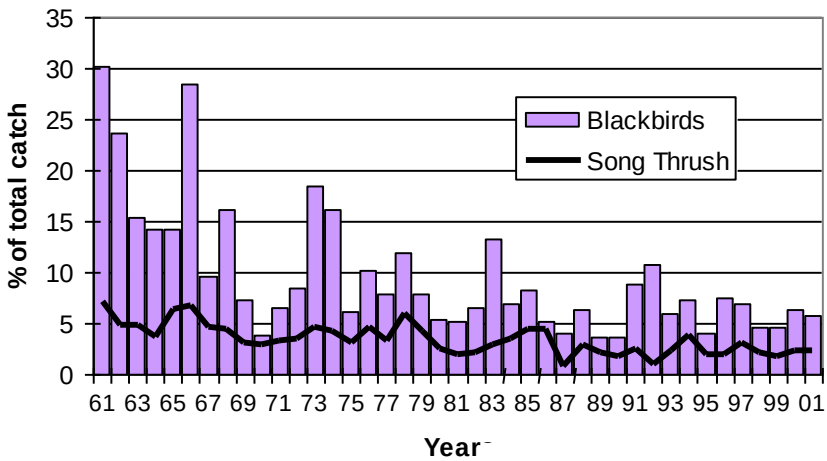
Clearly there are more factors responsible for these declining ringing numbers than population change; the lack of suitable seeds in the surrounding fields and, perhaps most significant, the loss of freshwater springs and suitable bathing pools in the streams to attract finches into the Sanctuary.

Figure 5 displays a similar plot for both the common *Turdus* species. Until about 1969 one of the interesting features at the Sanctuary was an autumn and winter nocturnal roost of thrushes. Blackbirds were the most numerous and in the 1960s up to 300 Blackbirds roosted in the copse The annual ringing totals also often exceeded 300 birds. Figure 5 shows the decline in Blackbird numbers after the dissolution of the roost and, with the exception of a few years, Blackbirds now comprise about 5% of the total birds trapped. Song Thrushes, despite declining dramatically on a national level (RSPB, 2000: Gregory *et al*, 2002), have maintained a similar proportion of the annual catch.



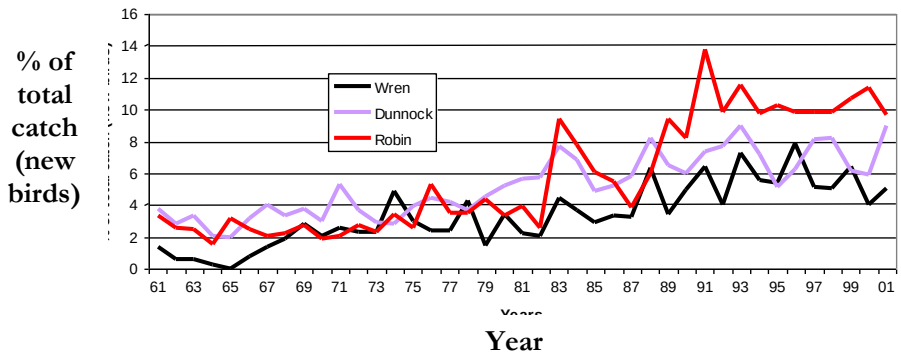
Corn Bunting – *John Reaney*

Figure 5: The proportion of the annual ringing totals (presented as a percentage) for Blackbirds and Song Thrushes (1961-2001)



The winter roosting birds in the 1950s and 1960s not only involved birds breeding locally, but also birds passing through or wintering in the area. Ringing at the roost produced eleven foreign recoveries and several distant British recoveries but since the roost was abandoned the recoveries have only involved local birds. Clearly, as some species decline so others have appeared to increase. Figure 6 plots the trends for the three common, and mainly resident, species. All three, although fluctuating, have risen steadily, a trend emphasised as other species numbers fall. Interestingly the very depressed population of Wrens (black) following the severe cold winter of 1962/62 is evident, and Robins (grey) have consistently been more numerous than Dunnocks (pale grey) in the last decade.

Figure 6: The proportion of the annual ringing totals (presented as a percentage) for Wrens, Dunnocks and Robins (1961-2001)



Other wildlife taxa have been incompletely recorded and described. The botany has been the most comprehensively tackled and listings can be found by Colonel W.R. Roberts (1954 Report – reprinted 1978) and Helyer (1979). Butterflies are perhaps the next best recorded group and the following are the species seen or recorded near the copse. To this end, the slopes of Mill Hill have been particularly rich in butterflies and thus enhance the numbers recorded. The table also shows the species recorded by Gay and Gay (1996) for the tetrad (2km x 2km square) including the Sanctuary.

Table 2: Butterflies recorded at the Sanctuary (S) and in the same tetrad (A) from Gay and Gay (1996)

Small Skipper	S	A	Holly Blue	S	A	Camberwell Beauty	S	
Essex Skipper		A	White Letter Hairstreak		A	Peacock	S	A
Large Skipper	S	A	Small Copper	S	A	Comma	S	A
Dingy Skipper		A	Small Blue		A	Dark Green Fritillary		A
Grizzled Skipper	S	A	Brown Argus	S	A	Speckled Wood	S	A

Clouded Yellow	S	A	Common Blue	S	A	Wall Brown	S	A
Brimstone	S	A	Chalkhill Blue	S	A	Marbled White	S	A
Large White	S	A	Adonis Blue	S	A	Gatekeeper Hedge Brown	S	A
Small White	S	A	Red Admiral	S	A	Meadow Brown	S	A
Green-veined White	S	A	Painted Lady	S	A	Small Heath	S	A
Orange Tip	S	A	Small Tortoiseshell	S	A	The Monarch	S	

The Monarch was trapped in a mist-net in August 1983, a date not suggesting a transatlantic vagrant, and the Camberwell Beauty was watched sunning itself on the willow in August 1995.

Adonis Blues – *Brianne Reeve*

During the 1960s some moth trapping was done by Michael Goddard but no detailed lists or records were made. During the same period there were small mammal traps in the ringing hut, presumably equipment used for mammal studies but none of these early records are available. Some of the more obvious taxa have been recorded and these, although incomplete, are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Dragon/Damselflies, Amphibians/Reptiles and Mammals recorded at the Sanctuary

Dragon/damselflies	Amphibians/Reptiles	Mammals	
Common damselfly	Common Toad	Hedgehog	Brown rat
Beautiful demoiselle	Common Frog	Mole	House mouse
Common hawker	Viviparous Lizard Common Lizard	Common Shrew	Fox
Emperor dragonfly	Slow-worm	Pipistrelle	Stoat
Broad-bodied chaser	Grass Snake	Rabbit	Weasel
Common darter		Brown hare	Polecat
Ruddy darter		Grey squirrel	Mink
		Field vole	Badger
		Water vole	Roe deer

The mammals are most interesting although the records of mice, voles and shrews are incomplete. The first Grey Squirrels were recorded at the Sanctuary in 1977 as notes referred to the increase in sycamore woodland. Although a small, and unidentified, deer was seen on the hillside about 1980 the occurrence of Roe Deer has also been a recent phenomena. Mink were first suspected in 1987 and it was not many years before their presence was confirmed. Perhaps they contributed to the demise of the Water Vole at the Sanctuary. It is also many years since a Brown Hare has been recorded in the surrounding fields. The polecat was trapped by the area Pest Control Officer in the chicken house of Bill Schultz in 1993.

Conclusion

The Society's Sanctuary has been well watched and studied during the last half century. Detailed ringing records are available from 1961 since when 1433 ringing sessions have trapped 26,498 birds of 76 different species. Additionally there have been, perhaps more shorter visits to either count and record or undertake maintenance tasks. A total of 155 different species have been recorded of which 54 have been noted as breeding. The aims to study common species have been met. Some of the changes in the past 50 years have been documented, whether the Society will be in a position to document the future 50 years only time will tell. At the moment the group of young, active ringers of the 1950s and 1960s have moved on or grown older and sadly have not been replaced.

Acknowledgements:
The Society thanks all those who have contributed to the recording and work at the Sanctuary. None of this would have been possible without the co-operation of the Water Authorities and, in particular, the engineers who have lived in the waterworks cottage. I would like to thank Barrie Watson and Brian Clay for their helpful comments in the preparation of this review.

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Ed note: Past reports are available from :- SDOS Enquiries, 7 Berberis Court, Shoreham by Sea, West Sussex, BN43 6JA.

Table 4: Ringing Totals

*Ring = Ringing total 1961-2001, the figures exclude pulli ringed by Dr Barrie Watson and the Blackbird total for 1961 is estimated. Details of numbers ringed prior to 1961 specifically at the Sanctuary are unknown. *Date = date for species with single record.
*Br = Recorded breeding in Copse and surrounding fields.

Species Name	Br	Ring	Date	Species Name	Br	Ring	Date	Species Name	Br	Ring	Date
Little Grebe	B			Lesser Black-backed Gull				Sedge Warbler	B	352	
Fulmar				Herring Gull				Marsh Warbler		1	Sep-61
Cormorant				Great Black-backed Gull				Reed Warbler	B	1272	
Little Bittern				Sandwich Tern			Aug-99	Dartford Warbler		1	Oct-99
Little Egret			Aug-96	Common Tern			May-88	Barred Warbler		0	Aug-59
Grey Heron				Feral Pigeon				Lesser Whitethroat	B	629	
White Stork			Apr-82	Stock Dove				Whitethroat	B	349	
Glossy Ibis			Sep-86	Woodpigeon	B	48		Garden Warbler	B	326	
Mute Swan	B			Collared Dove	B	176		Blackcap	B	1534	
White-fronted Goose			Feb-79	Turtle Dove	B	17		Yellow-browed Warbler			Oct-85
Canada Goose				Ring-necked Parakeet			Oct-77	Wood Warbler		4	
Brent Goose				Great Spotted Cuckoo			Apr-90	Chiffchaff	B	1836	
Shelduck			Apr-64	Cuckoo	B	4		Abietinus/ tristis Chiffchaff		1	Nov-81
Wigeon				Barn Owl				Willow Warbler	B	2653	
Teal				Little Owl				Goldcrest	B	339	
Mallard	B			Tawny Owl	B	5		Firecrest		10	
Pintail				Long-eared Owl				Spotted Flycatcher	B	146	
Garganey				Short-eared Owl			Oct-93	Pied Flycatcher		17	
Shoveler				Nightjar			Sep-57	Long-tailed Tit	B	433	
Red Kite			May-00	Swift				Marsh Tit		2	
Marsh Harrier			May-80	Kingfisher		58		Coal Tit		5	
Hen Harrier			Jan-79	Hoopoe			Aug-56	Blue Tit	B	2198	
Sparrowhawk	B	17		Wryneck			Aug-76	Great Tit	B	919	
Buzzard				Green Woodpecker		15		Nuthatch		1	Jul-02
Rough-legged Buzzard			Nov-74	Great Spotted Woodpecker		24		Treecreeper		21	
Osprey			Jul-95	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker		2		Red-backed Shrike			May-57
Kestrel	B	4		Skylark	B	5		Great Grey Shrike			Oct-53

Species Name	Br	Ring	Date	Species Name	Br	Ring	Date	Species Name	Br	Ring	Date
Merlin			Oct-79	Sand Martin		10		Woodchat Shrike			Sep-56
Hobby				Swallow	B	690		Jay		9	
Peregrine Falcon				House Martin		2596		Magpie	B	10	
Red-legged Partridge			55	Tree Pipit		4		Jackdaw	B		
Grey Partridge	B			Meadow Pipit	B	21		Rook			
Quail			Mar-67	Yellow Wagtail		5		Carrion Crow	B	5	
Pheasant	B			Grey Wagtail		4		Raven			Dec-96
Water Rail		2		Pied Wagtail	B	20		Starling	B	328	
Moorhen	B	5		Wren	B	918		House Sparrow	B	86	
Ringed Plover			Sep-57	Dunnock	B	1450		Tree Sparrow	B	39	
Golden Plover				Robin	B	1413		Chaffinch	B	1184	
Lapwing				Nightingale	B	10		Brambling		26	
Dunlin				Black Redstart				Greenfinch	B	2875	
Jack Snipe				Redstart		20		Goldfinch	B	1629	
Snipe		17		Whinchat		9		Siskin			
Woodcock		1		Stonechat	B	15		Linnet	B	565	
Whimbrel				Wheatear		3		Lesser Redpoll		31	
Curlew				Ring Ouzel				Common Crossbill			
Redshank				Blackbird	B	3147 *		Bullfinch	B	999	
Greenshank				Fieldfare		5		Yellowhammer	B	303	
Green Sandpiper				Song Thrush	B	1126		Cirl Bunting	B		
Common Sandpiper		4		Redwing		126		Ortolan Bunting		1	Sep-85
Mediterranean Gull			Mar-02	Mistle Thrush	B	69		Reed Bunting	B	52	
Black-headed Gull				Cetti's Warbler		1	Oct-77	Corn Bunting	B	245	
Common Gull				Grasshopper Warbler	B	3					

The Barred Warbler, ringed in 1959, is the only species known to have been ringed prior to 1961 and not since.

Tree Sparrow – *John Reaney*

Our bird sanctuary *J M Twort*

J. M. Twort is mentioned several times in this book as a much respected bird-watcher. He was virtually blind in the late 1970's but amused himself by writing poetry. Two poems are reproduced in this book showing his delight in past memories of birds.

Our Sanctuary at Shoreham,
Close to the Sussex Downs,
Is to our members a place of some renown.
Notes by our ringer are both concise and clear,
Recorded in a book in a shed very near.

Many common Warblers pass through here every year,
And once even a Barred one did suddenly appear.
Blackcaps and Whitethroats, Sedge and Reed,
Come here for nesting, or perhaps just to feed.

That which surprised us was a Great Grey Shrike,
Which to members present was a very pleasing sight.
Then we had Redstarts and the Black one too,
Which arrived in our Sanctuary in ones and twos.

Of other birds which I must surely tell,
Were Spotted Flycatchers and the Pied one as well.
Two Little Grebes flew into the Sanctuary one day,
But they didn't like it so they went away.

We had many Titmice, the Great and the Blue,
But where they came from, nobody knew.
There are other birds which I shan't mention,
But to tell you why is not my intention.

You may try to find a word to rhyme with Ousel,
But in my opinion that word you'll foozle.
If the identification of birds causes you anxiety,
Then I advise you to join our Society.

RINGING

Fifty years of ringing *John Newnham*

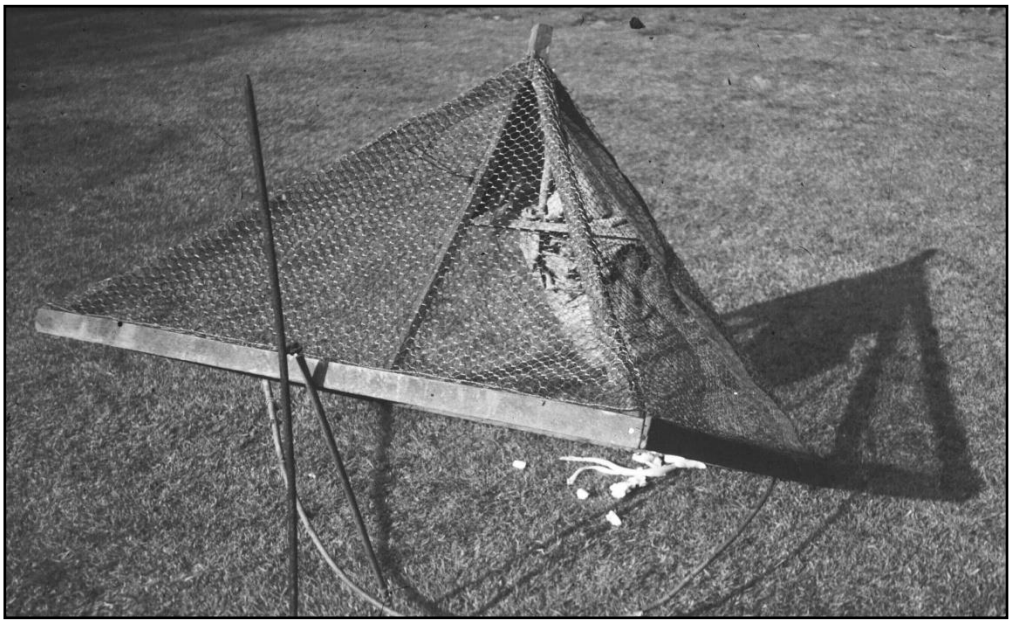
Introduction

The Society, from its foundation, has encouraged and promoted ringing. Indeed each of the annual reports have documented these activities and have often included articles stemming from ringing. These reports are listed and referenced at the end of this article in which the local ringing is reviewed, and some of the results presented.

In 1953 John Stafford was the only member of the society allowed to use the metal rings which were issued by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). In those days there was no parliamentary act legislating on the handling of birds, and training programmes were organised on an 'ad hoc' basis. During the following decades this changed as strict controls were introduced. The BTO changed their system for ringing permits in 1965 issuing the ringers with a number, which they kept from year to year. The Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 required ringers to hold specific government licences to capture and handle birds and, over the ensuing years, the BTO reviewed, and re-reviewed, the programme of training and education for ringers.

The acquisition of the Sanctuary in 1953 gave local ringing a base and an interesting site to regularly work. At that time this was the only ringing station between Dungeness and Portland Bill.

During these early years a high proportion of the birds ringed were trapped in gardens using ingenious wire traps with fascinating names such as Potter, Frankfurt and Chardoneret traps.



A drop trap from the early fifties – *John Stafford*

The designs could be found in Davis (1981) but most worked by luring birds with bait into a wire cage with an entrance which was either funnel shaped or a trap door. This door was either "sprung" by the bird taking the bait or by an observing ringer. Nylon mist nets, originating in Japan, were first tested in this area by John Stafford in 1957. These revolutionised bird trapping and soon became the standard means of catching birds for ringing even in gardens. In the 1970s, however, a light weight net, rapidly pulled over feeding birds by a strong length of elastic, was successfully used to capture Starlings feeding on the lawn in a West Worthing garden. This "whoosh" net was a variant of the

"clap" nets used successfully by the bird trappers of the nineteenth century. Table 3 (page 56) shows the prevalence of garden ringed species amongst the top 20 species ringed between 1953 and 1980.

Taking a wing measurement - *Barrie Watson*

Ringing activity during the first two decades of the Society's life was not limited to gardens and the Sanctuary. A winter starling roost at Applesham was mist netted and during the harsh winter of 1962/63 over 500 birds, including 117 Tree Sparrows, 26 Skylarks and 3 Bramblings, were ringed in a local kale patch. Several birds have been ringed at Lancing College, initially by R Catchpole but later by Dr Barrie Watson who, rumour suggests, had a mist-net spread whilst running a medical surgery for the boys in the college.

In the late 1950s a study on the local Mute Swans was started by Tony Marr (Marr, 1958a), continued by David Stone and Andrew Gagg (Stone, 1961; 1962) and resumed during the late 1960s, perhaps in more detail, by Phil Belman (Belman, 1968). Catching swans needed characteristics not usually associated with ringing including strength, a degree of courage and a canny guile to outwit the swans. Another early project involved nocturnal mist-netting sessions on the mudflats of the Adur to trap waders. This was a time consuming exercise and in the first period over 40 hours work resulted in 19 waders ringed (Marr, 1958b). This study also resumed in the 1970s when larger numbers of wading birds were trapped. It was then demonstrated that Dunlin returned from their northern breeding grounds to spend successive winters on the Adur mudflats (Newnham, 1976). Ringing on these mudflats in the night was a perilous pursuit and on several occasions Wellington boots were left in the deep sticky mud and on one winter's night a luckless helper lost balance falling backward into the soft substrate and no sooner had she recovered and returned to the vertical she lost her footing again falling face first into the food-rich but unpleasant slime. A frightening event at the time but, with hindsight, now draws a smile.

As time advanced, and more ringers were trained in the area, so more sites were used. At the eastern end of the Society's area Brian Short and Phil Belman ringed independently near Patcham whilst David Murdoch, and more recently, John and Charlie Holt ringed at Hove. Barrie Watson, often helped by Catrina Tyson (now Barrett), started ringing in a dry reed bed on the west side of the airfield in the 1970s and later concentrated on a reed bed roost site near the Adur flyover where most of the area's Pied Wagtails have been trapped and ringed.

In 1972 Phil Clay started ringing at Strivens reed bed in Steyning. A few years later, in 1976, the Steyning Ringing Group (SRG) was founded. This group grew in strength, particularly in the 1980s after the purchase of the reserve at the Mumbles was completed and ringing had started on the north slopes of Cissbury. More details of these activities can be read in this book and in the references listed below. The SRG has operated other sites notably at Sandgate Park, near Sullington and at Wiston. Perhaps the most revealing and surprising of these ringing projects was completed during the summer and autumn of 1993 when Chris Fox ringed in excess of 2000 birds, most of which were migrants, in a hedgerow in his Wiston garden. The high diversity of species and large number of birds were attracted by sound lures automatically set to start just prior to dawn. This intensive, yet short-lived, effort showed what could be achieved by using modern technology.

The study, which has produced most birds, gathered the largest numbers of recoveries and was responsible for bringing many local ringers together, was the gull ringing programme. Cannon netting was started by the London Gull Study Group on the beaches at Worthing in 1975 but the programme really gathered momentum in 1979 when Barrie Watson completed his training to hold a licence to use cannon nets. The whole operation required military precision as the large net was fired over feeding birds by four 7lb metal projectiles each fired from gunpowder charged 2" bore cannons. Clearly safety for birds, operators and all in the vicinity was of paramount importance but the large net could catch large numbers of gulls, and indeed huge numbers were caught. Several of the local beaches were used and on two occasions the gear was set on downland to catch Black-headed Gulls feeding behind the plough. Without doubt, however, the most productive catches were on the refuse tips and those at Sompting, Washington and Small Dole were all used. The staff at Sompting were most co-operative and the regular bulldozer driver became adept at steering large flocks of feeding gulls into the "catching area" before retreating safely for the "bang". The project received notoriety by featuring in the colour supplement of the Sunday Observer. Gull ringing gradually petered out in the early 1990s as the local refuse tips filled and closed. The lion's share of the organisation, preparation and, worst of all, cleaning of the equipment fell on Dr Barrie Watson so the cessation of this successful project was probably met with relief in some quarters.

Results:-

Between 1953 and 2001 (49 years) a total of 126, 623 birds have been ringed in the area and table 1 shows the numbers for the 119 different species.

Table 1: List of the 119 species ringed in the Shoreham area with the grand total of 126,623 birds (1953 –2001)

Species	No. Ringed	Species	No. Ringed	Species	No. Ringed
Little Grebe	4	Swift	24	Blackcap	7981
Storm Petrel	1	Kingfisher	108	Yellow-browed Warbler	1
Mute Swan	301	Green Woodpecker	61	Wood Warbler	9
Whooper Swan	1	Great Spotted Woodpecker	86	Chiffchaff	5415
Canada Goose	1	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	8	Willow Warbler	7936
Shelduck	1	Skylark	76	Goldcrest	1770
Mallard	1	Sand Martin	830	Firecrest	41
Sparrowhawk	46	Swallow	3128	Spotted Flycatcher	261
Kestrel	52	House Martin	4844	Pied Flycatcher	44
Water Rail	8	Tree Pipit	11	Long-tailed Tit	1190
Corncrake	1	Meadow Pipit	70	Marsh Tit	134
Moorhen	18	Yellow Wagtail	35	Willow Tit	30
Coot	1	Grey Wagtail	10	Coal Tit	161
Stone Curlew	2	Pied Wagtail	1583	Blue Tit	10850
Ringed Plover	5	Wren	2494	Great Tit	4491
Lapwing	10	Dunnock	3879	Nuthatch	33
Knot	2	Robin	3871	Treecreeper	137
Little Stint	1	Nightingale	64	Jay	28
Dunlin	419	Bluethroat	1	Magpie	32
Snipe	34	Black Redstart	5	Jackdaw	43
Woodcock	1	Redstart	115	Rook	34
Bar-tailed Godwit	1	Whinchat	21	Carrion Crow	26
Redshank	68	Stonechat	31	Starling	4747
Common Sandpiper	4	Wheatear	13	House Sparrow	1546
Grey Phalarope	1	Ring Ouzel	11	Tree Sparrow	217
Mediterranean Gull	1	Blackbird	7878	Chaffinch	2305
Black-headed Gull	19071	Fieldfare	18	Brambling	43
Common Gull	715	Song Thrush	3151	Greenfinch	5603
Lesser Black-backed Gull	38	Redwing	221	Goldfinch	2301
Herring Gull	1296	Mistle Thrush	153	Siskin	17
Great Black-backed Gull	140	Cetti's Warbler	1	Linnet	776
Stock Dove	9	Grasshopper Warbler	51	Twite	1

Species	No. Ringed	Species	No. Ringed	Species	No. Ringed
Woodpigeon	121	Sedge Warbler	1117	Redpoll	113
Collared Dove	219	Marsh Warbler	1	Bullfinch	1886
Turtle Dove	31	Reed Warbler	3523	Snow Bunting	1
Cuckoo	12	Dartford Warbler	1	Yellowhammer	541
Barn Owl	16	Barred Warbler	1	Ortolan Bunting	1
Little Owl	16	Lesser Whitethroat	1233	Reed Bunting	487
Tawny Owl	17	Whitethroat	2672	Corn Bunting	311
Nightjar	7	Garden Warbler	987	Total	126623

Only 13, all passerines, have been ringed in each year and these are shown in Table 2. Whitethroat is perhaps a surprising inclusion in this table particularly as low numbers were present in the early 1970s. Its presence is emphasised by the absence of both Reed and Sedge Warbler and, perhaps more surprisingly, Blackcap which is the warbler with the highest ringing total in the area.

Table 2: List of species ringed in each year in the Shoreham area (1953 –2001)

Wren	Dunnock	Robin	Blackbird	Song Thrush	Whitethroat	Chiffchaff
Willow Warbler	Blue Tit	Great Tit	Starling	Chaffinch	Greenfinch	

A study of a Greenfinch – *John Stafford*

Table 3 lists twenty species which have only been ringed once, but to this group perhaps Stone Curlew and Knot should be added as for both species two individuals were ringed in a single year. The same table lists the top twenty species and separates these lists into two roughly equal periods, prior to 1980 and post 1980. The changing positions reflect ringing activity and, perhaps to a lesser degree, changing bird populations.

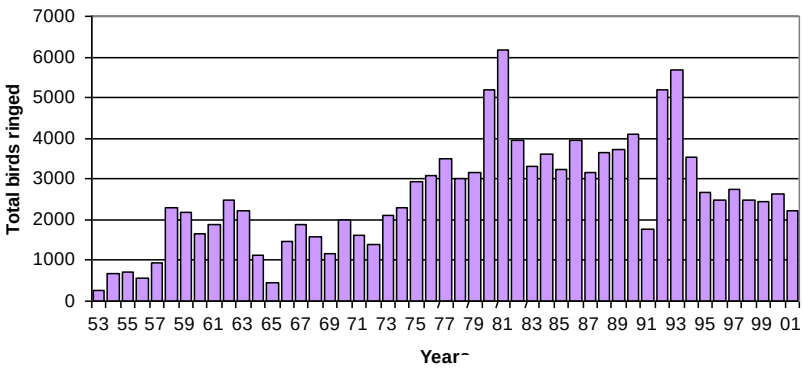
Table 3: List of species ringed only once and the top 20 species in three different time periods

Only single birds	Top 20 pre 1980	Top 20 post 1980	Overall Top 20
Storm Petrel	Blackbird	Black-headed Gull	Black-headed Gull
Whooper Swan	Blue Tit	Blackcap	Blue Tit
Canada Goose	Greenfinch	Blue Tit	Blackcap
Shelduck	Starling	Willow Warbler	Willow Warbler
Mallard	Willow Warbler	Chiffchaff	Blackbird
Corncrake	House Martin	Great Tit	Greenfinch
Coot	Black-headed Gull	House Martin	Chiffchaff
Little Stint	Song Thrush	Robin	House Martin
Woodcock	Great Tit	Blackbird	Starling
Bar-tailed Godwit	Swallow	Dunnock	Great Tit
Grey Phalarope	Goldfinch	Reed Warbler	Robin
Bluethroat	Dunnock	Whitethroat	Dunnock
Cetti's Warbler	House Sparrow	Wren	Reed Warbler
Marsh Warbler	Chaffinch	Swallow	Swallow
Dartford Warbler	Chiffchaff	Greenfinch	Song Thrush
Barred Warbler	Robin	Goldcrest	Whitethroat
Yellow-browed Warbler	Reed Warbler	Starling	Wren
Twite	Bullfinch	Pied Wagtail	Chaffinch
Snow Bunting	Wren	Herring Gull	Goldfinch
Ortolan Bunting	Blackcap	Song Thrush	Bullfinch

Notable changes shown in Table 3 include the loss of four seed eating species, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Bullfinch, from the most caught species in the later period to be replaced by Whitethroat and Goldcrest. Certainly the presence of Herring Gull and Pied Wagtail amongst the top species in the period since 1980 is related solely to these species being the targets of directed ringing activity.

The ringing effort has not been uniform over the last half century and Figure 1 shows the fluctuations in the numbers ringed in each year.

Figure 1: The annual ringing totals for the Shoreham area 1953 -2001



Only in six years, all before 1966, were less than 1000 birds ringed with 32 of the 49 years displayed having totals in excess of 2000 and in five years the total exceeded 4000 birds ringed. The two obvious peaks, shown in Figure 1, are in the early 1980s when the gull ringing was at its height and a decade later when the SRG were enjoying bumper catches at several sites.

In each year most recoveries, other than those involving only local movements, have been presented in the annual ringing reviews. Table 4 shows a summary of these recoveries for the 49 years (1953-2001) and includes 1197 from the United Kingdom, 1367 from various European states and 16 from either Africa or the near East. These data are known to be incomplete as local movements are not included and in most years some recovery details have arrived from the BTO too late for publication in the annual report. The table clearly shows the mass of recoveries and controls (birds ringed elsewhere and trapped locally) generated by the gull study and shows that most movements recorded in that study were from Europe.

Table 4: The number of recoveries and controls reported from local ringing 1953 -2001

Species	U.K.	Foreign	Total	Species	U.K.	Foreign	Total	Species	U.K.	Foreign	Total
Mute Swan	39	1	40	Sand Martin	5	1	6	Chiffchaff	26	5	31
Whooper Swan	0	1	1	Swallow	18	3	21	Willow Warbler	24	3	27
Sparrowhawk	2	0	2	House Martin	16	2	18	Goldcrest	3	2	5
Kestrel	5	1	6	Pied Wagtail	14	0	14	Spotted Flycatcher	0	1	1
Ringed Plover	1	0	1	Wren	1	0	1	Long-tailed Tit	1	0	1
Dunlin	2	7	9	Robin	8	3	11	Blue Tit	25	0	25
Redshank	1	0	1	Nightingale	1	0	1	Great Tit	6	1	7
Med Gull	0	2	2	Redstart	2	1	3	Magpie	2	0	2
Black-headed Gull	600	984	1584	Wheatear	1	0	1	Rook	1	0	1
Black-headed Gull (controls)	44	201	245	Blackbird	5	11	16	Starling	18	36	54
Common Gull	6	48	54	Fieldfare	0	1	1	Chaffinch	2	3	5
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	2	3	Song Thrush	4	4	8	Greenfinch	19	0	19
Herring Gull	137	18	155	Redwing	1	1	2	Goldfinch	3	11	14
Great Black-backed Gull	3	4	7	Mistle Thrush	1	0	1	Linnet	0	1	1
Woodpigeon	2	0	2	Sedge Warbler	6	2	8	Redpoll	1	0	1
Barn Owl	3	0	3	Reed Warbler	59	9	68	Yellowhammer	1	0	1
Tawny Owl	1	0	1	Lesser Whitethroat	8	3	11	Reed Bunting	3	0	3
Kingfisher	3	0	3	Whitethroat	1	1	2	Corn Bunting	2	0	2
Green Woodpecker	1	0	1	Garden Warbler	10	0	10				
Great Spotted Woodpecker	1	0	1	Blackcap	47	9	56				

Table 4 shows, in bold print, those species for which recovery maps have been drawn in *The Birds of Shoreham* (1988) or have been discussed in more detail (Leverton, 1988; Newnham, 1985). All recoveries provide some information about the life of individual birds, but some are quite spectacular and those mentioned herewith are those the author has found particularly exciting.

Long distance movements are the most thrilling, thus movements reported from the Southern Hemisphere are noteworthy. Although it has been known for many years that British swallows spend the winter in South Africa it is, nevertheless, pleasing to hear of locally ringed birds, in both 1959 and 1992, from their wintering area. Most of the area's other African recoveries are from North Africa, but two autumn ringed Chiffchaffs were recorded further south. The first alighted on a trimaran in mid-Atlantic, some 300 miles SSW of the Canary Islands, in November 1971 and the other was captured in Senegal in December 1992. Two spring ringed Chiffchaffs have also been noteworthy; one found dead in Manchester on 9 January 1977 raised a question about the origin of British

wintering Chiffchaffs, whilst the other recovered in Denmark in May 1988 had been ringed in the Sanctuary only 17 days earlier. The rapidity of this distant recovery, however, was overshadowed by a Willow Warbler which was controlled at Cissbury in mid- September 1996 having been ringed 1292 km further north on the Faroes Islands just seven days earlier.

Most of the other common warblers have provided recoveries from south-western Europe or North Africa either during their autumn or spring migrations. The Lesser Whitethroat, however, takes a more easterly route and this area's ringing has produced two birds from Egypt and one from Israel. Several of the species which spend the winter in the area have also arisen from countries to the east. Several Starlings have been recovered from the former Soviet Union and the gull studies have produced movements from further east with a Black-headed Gull being found near Pechora, approximately 3700 km ENE, and a Common Gull which nearly reached the 46º E longitude line. During the gull studies only two Mediterranean Gulls were trapped and interestingly, both furthered national knowledge on the movements and spread of this species. The first, trapped on Hove beach in January 1977 had been ringed five years previously in Belgium. The second, also an adult, was ringed on Sompting refuse tip in December 1988 and was recorded nesting in a colony of Slender-billed Gulls in the Carmargue, France in June 1990.

National firsts, such as the last example, always generate excitement. Included in this group was an immature Whooper Swan, ringed whilst spending part of the harsh 1962/63 winter amongst Mute Swans at Shoreham, and found dead the following year in Gotland, Sweden. More mundane, but also from the 1960s, was a Great Tit ringed in March and recovered four months later in Germany. This remains the only foreign movement recorded from this area of this usually sedentary genus although three Blue Tits ringed at Beachy Head on either the 26th or 27th September 1986 were subsequently controlled in Shoreham, two within four days of each other. Coincidence may be the reason for some groups of recoveries but it is interesting that the only two recoveries of Reed Buntings from the area, in 1978 and 1982, were from Banbury in Oxfordshire. In the same vein, two Robins ringed at the Sanctuary during October 1979 were recovered in subsequent springs in Denmark and the only two Reed Warblers, bearing rings from elsewhere, caught at the Sanctuary in 2001 were both ringed at the same East Anglian site.

Far less has been written in local reports about some of the other aspects of ringing results including mortality, longevity, site fidelity and biometrics. Newnham (1977) reviewed the details of local recoveries noting, where possible, the cause of the birds death. Reference to wing and weight measurements have been made in relation to some species including Willow Warblers (Wright and Newnham, 1977), Dunlins (Newnham, 1976) and Blue Tits (Newnham, 1974). A review of the measurements taken from Common Gulls caught at Sompting led to one, along with two other birds from other sites, being accepted by the British Ornithological Union as the only British records of the race *Larus canus heinei* (Newnham and Watson, 1993). As more ringing records are computerised so more studies, involving biometrics and the extensive retrap data, may be undertaken.

Summary and Conclusion

This article includes just a fraction of the many and varied ringing records achieved in this area. The time and effort put in by all the ringers to achieve this is immeasurable. More definable, although of little relevance, is the staggering thought that the cost of rings used in this area, measured in today's prices, falls only a few pounds short of £25,000. The Society has supported this aspect of local ornithology with enthusiasm and from ringing much has been learned about the avifauna of the Shoreham district.

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I thank Dr Barrie Watson and Brian Clay for reading and correcting this article and finally I would like to express the Society's appreciation to the ringers who have contributed to this aspect of ornithology in this area. Below are listed the ringers whose names appear in various reports (excluding all those who joined the cannon netting teams) in an approximate chronological order. Many are no longer ringing and some only worked as training ringers either at the Sanctuary or with the SRG.

Dr John Stafford, R. Catchpole, Tony (BAE) Marr, David Stone, Michael (MJS) Goddard, Andrew Gagg, Dr Barrie (AB) Watson, Dr John Newnham, Philip Belman, Richard Granshaw, Brian Short, Colin Messer, Brian Clay, Philip Clay, Catrina Barrett (nee Tyson), Anne Watson, Peter Stanley, Mark Fletcher, Ann Scott (nee Taylor), Dr Mark (CMV) Wright, Tim Oldham, Mike (MP) Hall, Graham Brown, Jonathan Cooke, Duncan Heryett, Dr David Murdoch, Judith Baker, Ron Little, Martin Banks, Roy Hughes, Len Mayhead, John Barret, David King, Chris Fox, Jane Watson, Lysbeth Muirhead, Phil Turney, Nigel Matthews, Charlie Holt, Val Bentley, Bill Woodford, Margo Watson, Mark Collier, Ralph Hartfree, Vanessa Woodford, Dave Buckingham, Mark Hopkins, Mike Prince, John Holt, Sarah Dawkins, Thomas O'Sullivan, Paul Hallier.

Bird ringing At Cissbury *Brian Clay*

How it all began

Back in the late 1970's and the early 1980's there were exciting reports on the grapevine of large autumn movements of Warblers and Chats at Cissbury. Hundreds were reported to have been seen. They were bush-hopping in a south-westerly direction from the north face of the ring, past the car park, and round the western side of the ring above Findon Valley which at that time was open scrub. Long-standing members of the Shoreham District Ornithological Society (SDOS) may recall that Bernie Forbes documented these events in the 1981 Annual Report. In his article he tabulated the Warbler passage and also described the passage of Finches, Flycatchers and Pipits. He even mapped the main movements. He concluded his summary by encouraging members to study the area in greater depth.

His plea did not fall on deaf ears. In his article on other pages my brother Phil Clay has described how the fortunes of the Steyning Ringing Group were at a low ebb at the time. We were a group of ringers with few birds to ring. Phil saw an opportunity, found the right contacts and by 1984 permission had been obtained to commence ringing activities at Cissbury.

Setting up the site

The location of the site was to the south-east of the ring, almost on the Ring's shoulder at the western end of Lychpole Hill. Ringing had to be confined within the land owned by Worthing Borough Council. This meant that all nets had to be above the diagonal path heading almost due eastwards from the edge of the Ring down to the bottom of the slope. We could get cars on to the site by coming up from the A27 at Worthing so the base camp

was right on the top of the hill.

Net rides were cut down the hillside to finish just short of the path. The rides were made at right-angles to the slope to intercept the flight path of the birds. Sites were chosen where the scrub was not too high to ensure that the birds did not fly over the tops of the nine foot high nets. The net rides varied in length to accommodate mostly 40 or 60 foot long nets which were often linked together. The longest ride, comprising four linked nets, plunged 220 feet straight down the slope. We were much fitter in those days! There were shooting rights on this part of the hill so we had to work with the local gamekeeper to ensure things remained harmonious.
Eventually all the preparations were in place and it was with great excitement and anticipation that we met at 05:30 on 29 July 1984 to set up four nets for the first ringing session.

Early Results

So what did we catch on that first session, a clear, sunny and very hot day? Only 10 birds!! A huge disappointment. And the second attempt was little better. Just 19 birds of which 10 were Dunnocks. No disrespect to the humble Dunnock but we were after more exotic fare. Where were all those chats and warblers so enticingly described by Bernie? We battled on. We tried an evening catch but that was worse – only 3 birds including another Dunnock! Finally on the 19 August we achieved a respectable catch of 69 birds. First in the net, and a first ringing tick for the group, was a Pied Flycatcher. Many of the other birds were Blue tits and Long-tailed Tits but at least 50% were warblers; mostly Willow Warblers but Garden Warblers, Whitethroats, Lesser Whitethroats and a second Pied Flycatcher were caught as well. Reed Warblers, Redstarts and Tree Pipits were sighted. The icing was a Buzzard circling overhead. Illustrious visitors in the form of CM (Colin Messer?), RK (?) and TC (?) were impressed. We were elated, we thought we had cracked it. Was the site at last living up to its promise? Alas no. Despite the deployment of more nets, catches returned to very low numbers with the nadir being a catch of only 2 birds on the 25th August. By the end of 1984 we had caught just 396 new birds, well below expectations.

Over the next couple of years we worked out the problems. Being high and exposed the site was very vulnerable to weather conditions with the slightest breeze billowing the nets. In windy conditions birds moved to the lower or sheltered slopes. There was no regular movement of birds. On the days when large catches were made weather conditions were favourable. Large feeding parties, involving over a hundred birds and led by Long-tailed Tits, would bush hop across the site. Rather than a steady catch of birds we would often be suddenly inundated as a feeding party moved through the site. We therefore had to be careful to ensure we had adequate numbers of ringers in case a feeding party arrived. With the extra nets we caught around 700 birds a year between April and October. Acceptable, but hard work for the return and well below original expectations. However visible migration was a compensation. Being high up we commanded excellent views and, when not too busy ringing, we recorded some good passage numbers in the autumn, particularly pipits and finches such as Redpoll and Siskin.

A change of scene

Whilst we were ringing at the top of the hill negotiations were taking place between the National Trust and the private landowner who owned the lower slopes of Cissbury and the western end of Lychpole Hill. The Trust successfully acquired the land and not long afterwards, Chris Fox from the ringing group, approached Glyn Jones, the National Trust warden, for permission for the group to ring on the lower slopes. Permission was readily granted for a site in the very area that Phil had originally identified but was refused permission by the very same landowner.

The new site was almost directly below the old location to the east of the Ring and just above the main lower track by the barn. The base camp was now on the flat at the bottom of the slope and cars could be brought down the track from the Ring car park. Late winter, early spring 1987 saw new net rides being cut. The first ringing session took place on 24 May. But once again disappointment struck – only 11 birds with 4 Dunnocks! We had made the mistake of siting net rides where it was easy to cut through the vegetation rather than selecting the optimum locations for catching the birds. Thus began a major habitat management initiative that continues to this day.

The management programme

If the habitat at the ringing site had been left unmanaged we would not still be ringing there today. Scrub is transitory, a midway stage between grassland and full woodland. When we arrived on the site there was a mixture of stages. Although there was no grazing there were still some areas of grass. These were in the process of being colonised by scrub. There was some very old scrub, rotting and collapsing under the weight of Old Man's Beard. And there were some mature Ash and Sycamore. These trees were dispersing seed across the site and young saplings were developing rapidly. Had we left the habitat alone there would be little open scrub today. If the Ash and Sycamore saplings had been able to take hold they would have developed to form a dense canopy depriving the flora below of light. The scrub and other plants below would have been shaded out and the diversity of species would have dropped. The older scrub would have continued to collapse, blanketing the ground.

It is not possible to restore the habitat to the optimum value when scrub made its initial colonisation of the grassland. The annual cycle of growth and decay enriches the soils enabling more vigorous plants to gain a foothold. Roy Leverton, who used to ring at a downland site near Lewes, has suggested that the only way to turn the clock back is to bulldoze the fertile topsoil off the site and wait for the regeneration cycle to begin again. Given the complaints that can result when even a few branches are lopped off a tree clearly such drastic action would be politically unacceptable! A more discreet management approach was required.

The Lychpole hillside is registered as a part of the Cissbury Ring Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), particularly because of its passage birds and scrubland. The National Trust had a management plan for the whole of its site and we had to devise a plan that was acceptable to the National Trust and also English Nature who register and monitor the SSSI's. Our local management plan for the ringing site involved removing many of the mature Ash and Sycamore to prevent seeding. We also proposed to open the canopy, remove saplings, create some clearings, and remove or thin or cut back some of the older scrub to allow rejuvenation. And finally we needed to reduce the overall height of the scrub to net level otherwise the birds would just fly straight over the nets!

Regular working parties have been held every winter, usually 5 or 6, involving ringers, volunteers and a wide range of equipment ranging from chainsaws to pruning saws. Overall the plan has worked well. But without grazing, at one time experimented with by the Trust, many of the clearings that we created have regrown quickly and have not been maintained. But when viewing the site from the north the managed ringing area now stands out dramatically from the maturing Ash and Sycamore woodland that is rapidly developing on the rest of the Lychpole slope.

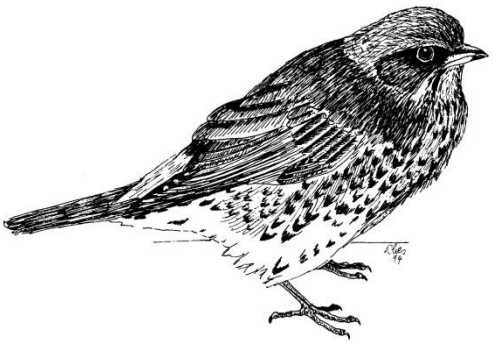
Constant Effort ringing

Whilst unstructured ringing sessions provide valuable data for the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO) national database, it has increasingly been recognised that more value can be obtained from ringing if it is done on a regular and systematic basis. Results can be compared from session to session and from year to year allowing population trends to be measured at both local and national levels. With this in mind the BTO devised the Constant Effort Scheme (CES) which, as its name suggests, requires ringing activity to be undertaken within set parameters.

To register under the scheme participants undertake to achieve 12 ringing sessions between the beginning of May and the end of August each year. All sessions must be of the same duration and the same basic nets must be used on each occasion, although additional nets are permitted. No ringing activity is allowed on the site in the 3 days preceding a CES ringing session to minimise disturbance. Habitat changes must also be kept to a minimum so that only natural changes in the bird populations are recorded rather than any influenced by extensive management work or other factors.

To operate a CES ringing regime requires a great deal of commitment and a pool of ringers to ensure that coverage can be maintained throughout the holiday periods. Having achieved the most substantial management work the group decided to take the plunge and successfully registered under the scheme. In 1992, having designated 9 nets as constant effort, we commenced our first CES ringing season. All 12 CES visits were achieved and the results sent off to the BTO. The full 12 sessions were also achieved in 1993 and we were looking forward to the 1994 season when rumours reached us of a disaster. With ideas of introducing cattle onto the hillside in an attempt to stem the demise of the scrub the National Trust had cut a huge ride all the way down the side of the hill to facilitate cattle movement. Unfortunately this ride went straight through the middle of two of our CES net rides.

After consultation with the BTO, we had to accept that the resultant habitat change had been so dramatic that our results were no longer acceptable to the national scheme. However we had restrained our habitat management to the minimum during 1992-1993 to comply with CES rules. Now that we were outside the official scheme we decided to accelerate a more radical management programme to optimise the habitat for the birds. And undaunted by the fact that we could no longer contribute to the national CES picture, we continued to ring within the CES rules and have done so to this day. These results are summarised later.



Fieldfare – *Richard Ives*

Summary of ringing results

General Ringing

Up to the end of 2001 we had put rings on 23,896 birds at Cissbury. In addition there have been 6,132 recaptures on site of some of these birds. 53 different species have been ringed ranging from singles of Missle Thrush, Corn Bunting, Stonechat and Whinchat to nearly 4,900 Blackcaps at the top of the list.

Whinchat about to land – *Eric Hosking*

Willow Warbler holds second place with a total of just over 3,400, but this success is based on former glories when the annual totals were over 200 birds, enhanced by tape luring

which we no longer do. Recent annual totals of this species have been below 100. The large numbers of House Martins ringed are the results of tape luring in September and October. Large numbers gather on the hillside in favourable conditions and can be brought down to a net by playing their calls.

Of the residents the Robin tops the chart at just over 1000 birds. Goldcrest is worth a mention as it is often thought of as just a resident. This is not the case at Cissbury where large annual influxes in some years have amounted to a total catch of over 1,250. The 9 Meadow Pipits on the list were the result of the enthusiasm of the late Bill Woodford, whose tragic death was a great shock to the ringing group. He persuaded us to try tape luring the pipits and was clearly successful. Rarities always cause excitement and we have caught a few that, whilst not in the "mega" category, are of more than passing interest. Firecrest occurs quite regularly; in fact 27 have been caught in total; more than some of the commoner resident species! Ring Ouzel and Yellow-browed Warbler are the other two that are worth a mention. We always worry that some drab bird with obscure distinguishing features has escaped detailed attention on a busy day and we've missed national fame! The full ringing total list is shown at Table 1 and is worth comparing with the totals for the Shoreham area.

Table 1: List of 53 species ringed at Cissbury from 1984 to 2001

Species	No. Ringed	Species	No. Ringed
Sparrowhawk	21	Blackcap	4,931
Kestrel	3	Yellow-browed Warbler	2
Woodpigeon	3	Wood Warbler	4
Cuckoo	2	Chiffchaff	2,513
Green Woodpecker	23	Willow Warbler	3,455
Swallow	26	Goldcrest	1,268
House Martin	2,050	Firecrest	27
Tree Pipit	3	Spotted Flycatcher	51
Meadow Pipit	9	Pied Flycatcher	12
Wren	782	Long tailed Tit	325
Dunnock	798	Marsh Tit	62
Robin	1,087	Coal Tit	5
Nightingale	26	Blue Tit	835
Redstart	64	Great Tit	507
Whinchat	1	Treecreeper	25
Stonechat	1	Jay	7
Ring Ouzel	9	Magpie	3
Blackbird	565	Chaffinch	240
Song Thrush	394	Greenfinch	14
Redwing	20	Goldfinch	26
Mistle Thrush	1	Siskin	14
Grasshopper Warbler	39	Linnet	53

Species	No. Ringed	Species	No. Ringed
Sedge Warbler	94	Redpoll	53
Reed Warbler	292	Bullfinch	542
Lesser Whitethroat	411	Yellowhammer	90
Whitethroat	1,617	Corn Bunting	1
Garden Warbler	490	**Total**	**23,896**

We have caught 44 birds that had already been ringed elsewhere by other ringers. Of these 42 had been ringed in the UK, but two had foreign rings. John Newnham has included details of some of the more interesting of these movements in his review of Ringing in the Shoreham Area. A summary of all the Cissbury "finds" is shown in Table 2. The 8 km local radius has been chosen as this includes other local ringing sites such as the Shoreham Sanctuary and the Mumbles at Steyning. Apart from the Blue Tits it is noticeable that nearly all the other species are migrants.

Table 2: List of birds ringed elsewhere and recaught at Cissbury 1984-2001

Species	Within 8 Km	Rest of Sussex	Rest of S East	Rest of England	Wales	Scotland	Faroes	France	Germany	Spain	Algeria	Morocco	Senegal	Egypt	Total
Kestrel	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
House Martin	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Nightingale	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Redstart	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Reed Warbler	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	4
Whitethroat	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Garden Warbler	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Blackcap	3	1	4	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18
Chiffchaff	-	1	-	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Goldcrest	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Willow Warbler	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Blue Tit	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Total	**8**	**4**	**6**	**21**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**-**	**1**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**44**

Table 3 shows the finding locations of birds ringed at Cissbury. These 90 birds, out of the 23,896 ringed, are all that have turned up elsewhere. To obtain just one of these recoveries, as they are known, means that statistically we need to ring around 266 birds. Some while ago a much better recovery rate of 1.7% was reported by John Newnham for ringing activities in the Shoreham area. This probably has much to do with the more remote location of the Cissbury site meaning that less of our resident birds turn up in local gardens. Also the Cissbury catch is more biased towards migrant birds which are less likely to be recovered. Nevertheless Table 3 does show that some resident birds are found locally. Blue Tits and Robins for instance turn up in Worthing town gardens and others are

reported from the Findon Valley. And just as a very small number of the birds rung at the Sanctuary and the Mumbles turn up at Cissbury, a sprinkling of Cissbury birds are retrapped at these sites. A large number of Blackcaps have been ringed at Cissbury and it is therefore not surprising that this species tops the list for recoveries; the foreign recoveries clearly indicating the wintering grounds in North-west Africa. A full analysis would take many pages. For instance the month of ringing and the month of recovery will give an indication of a bird's likely activity; on passage, breeding, wintering. The duration between original ringing and recovery will give information on speed of migration and longevity. The bird's location will provide information on the bird's migration routes, wintering grounds and so forth. All these parameters can be applied to each species which collated together produces the information for publications such as the recent and excellent BTO Migration Atlas.

Table 3: List of birds ringed at Cissbury and found elsewhere 1984-2001

Species	Within 8 Km	Rest of Sussex	Rest of S East	Rest of Engl'd	Wales	Scotland	Faroes	France	Germany	Spain	Algeria	Morocco	Senegal	Egypt	Total
Sparrowhawk	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Swallow	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
House Martin	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Wren	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Dunnock	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Robin	5	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Redstart	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Blackbird	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Song Thrush	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Reed Warbler	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Lesser Whitethroat	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3
Whitethroat	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Garden Warbler	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Blackcap	-	10	4	5	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	3	-	-	25
Chiffchaff	1	1	3	4	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	12
Willow Warbler	-	2	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Goldcrest	1	-	1	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
Blue Tit	7	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Great Tit	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Magpie	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Chaffinch	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Bullfinch	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total	**26**	**21**	**11**	**16**	**3**	**-**	**-**	**2**	**-**	**2**	**2**	**4**	**1**	**2**	**90**

Cat owners may not wish to read this paragraph! Table 4 shows the reasons the birds were found. Not unexpectedly nearly half of the reports are due to the activities of other ringers; a vital contribution at home and abroad. This capture and release of a previously ringed bird by a ringer in a different location is known as a control. But the second highest proportion results from the activities of our feline friends. It does not take too much crude mathematics to apply the recovery ratios mentioned above to get an idea of the scale of slaughter the domestic cat inflicts on our avian population.

Table 4: Analysis of finding reasons

Finding Information	No of Birds	Percent
Caught & released by another ringer	42	46.2
Killed by cat	15	16.5
Found dead - cause unknown	10	11.0
Killed by impact with glass/building	7	7.7
Drowned in tank	6	6.6
Trapped & released	3	3.3
Caught in netting	1	1.1
Killed by children	1	1.1
Possible emaciation	1	1.1
Road casualty	1	1.1
Shot	1	1.1
Trapped in building	1	1.1
Trapped & caged	1	1.1
No information	1	1.1
TOTAL	**91**	**100**

A couple of other figures in this table are also worthy of comment. The figure for road casualties is very low. In John Newnham's 1977 article his figure for road casualties was much higher at around 11% and an estimate for the Mumbles site is likely to be similar.

The main road casualties at the Mumbles are birds like Song Thrush and Blackbirds found dead on local roads as they are large enough to be noticed by the general public. Again the remoteness of the Cissbury site probably accounts for the lower figure. The large number of drownings was interesting. They were all recovered from a local water butt during a dry summer and they were all resident species. This shows the importance of drinking sites to birds in such localities. The tank was subsequently punctured to lower the water level in view of its lethal effect as attempts to make effective perches failed. Curiosity remains as to how many of our other residents met a similar fate in this tank. Unfortunately it has sunk deep into the ground otherwise…!

Constant Effort Results

As mentioned previously we are not part of the formal scheme but have continued to ring according to the CES rules. Because of the habitat change, both natural and managed, our results cannot be taken as a measure of changes in local bird population as the CES scheme is intended to reflect. Another caveat is that the ringing site is about 6.6 hectares of habitat entirely surrounded by similar but maturing growth. Thus we cannot be sure whether the birds we are ringing are from territories within the ringing site, are birds just using the site for feeding or just birds passing through. Despite our best efforts we have not yet managed to control the weather! So catches at crucial times in the breeding cycle can be limited by adverse conditions. These variations tend to be evened out at a national level as data from many sites is consolidated. But inclement conditions can adversely affect local year to year comparisons.

Finally the number of CES captures is small to the extent that the numbers are probably not statistically significant. Overall therefore data has to be treated with some caution. But having flagged up the warnings the results show a remarkable consistency. A complete analysis would be too extensive for this article but a couple of tables give a good flavour of the findings.
Table 5 shows the adult birds caught at the first 6 CES session each year in May and June. This period has been selected because it is much more likely that these are local birds in established breeding territories. From July onwards there is more movement in the population and some early migrants start to arrive. It is by no means a complete picture as some local adult females do not turn up in the net until later in the season once they have completed their nest sitting duties. However the table presents an interesting picture. It shows a relatively stable picture amongst the resident birds.

There is perhaps a mid-way peak in species such as Wren and Dunnock. The decline in numbers in more recent years may be due to the more recent extensive clearance of some the older scrub which would have suited these skulking species. As these areas regenerate however numbers may pick up. It is worth noting that despite its national problems, good Bullfinch numbers have remained stable. Song Thrush numbers are rather erratic for which there is no particular explanation.

Table 5: Adult birds caught at CES sessions
May & June 1992-2000

SPECIES	Visits 1-6 (May / June)								
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
ADULTS	**Residents**								
Wren	1	2	4	6	6	4	4	2	3
Dunnock	12	11	14	21	18	11	11	14	12
Robin	3	3	5	8	7	3	4	4	5
Blackbird	10	10	8	13	13	10	15	13	10
Song Thrush	1	2	6	10	2	1	5	2	1
Long-tailed Tit	2	3	3	9	2	4	-	2	5
Marsh Tit	-	-	1	2	1	1	1	-	2
Blue Tit	4	2	2	2	4	2	1	6	2
Great Tit	2	-	4	4	6	1	3	1	3
Chaffinch	1	2	3	1	1	2	3	2	3
Linnet	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	8	-
Bullfinch	8	13	9	12	7	12	4	13	11
RESIDENT TOTALS	**44**	**50**	**59**	**88**	**68**	**51**	**51**	**67**	**57**
	Migrants								
Nightingale	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Lesser Whitethroat	9	11	4	8	6	8	8	9	7
Whitethroat	7	4	5	8	13	16	7	7	13
Garden Warbler	2	4	-	6	7	11	8	9	9
Blackcap	5	8	9	10	5	11	9	18	10
Chiffchaff	2	1	1	-	1	1	4	2	7
Willow Warbler	3	11	6	3	5	8	7	10	11
MIGRANT TOTAL	**28**	**39**	**25**	**35**	**37**	**55**	**44**	**56**	**58**
ADULT TOTALS	**72**	**89**	**84**	**123**	**105**	**106**	**95**	**123**	**115**

The picture amongst the adult migrants, shown in table 5, is of either stable or increasing population which is very satisfying and we suspect is a result of the habitat management work. The increasing Willow Warbler numbers certainly seems to be bucking the national trend.

Table 6: Juvenile birds caught at CES sessions May to August 1992-2000

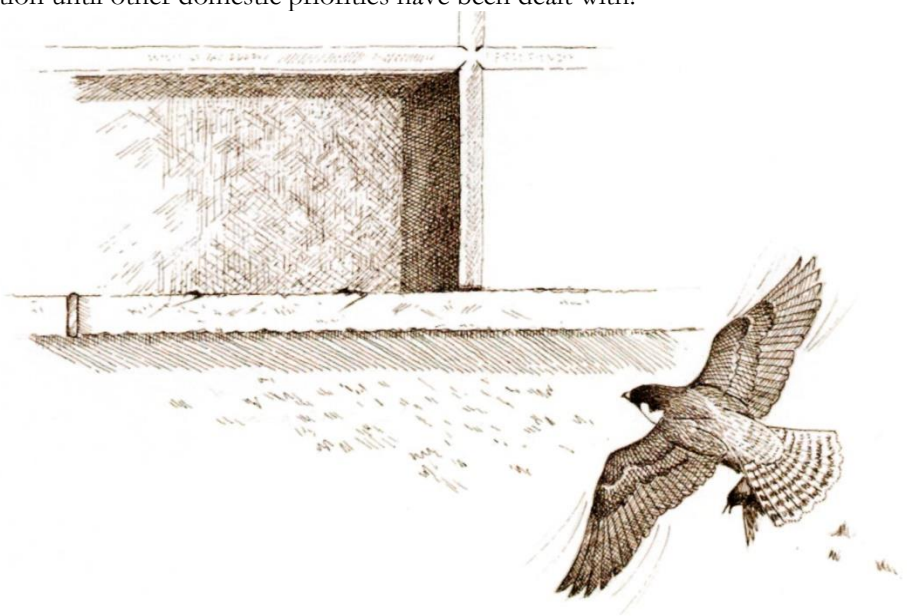
SPECIES	Visits 1-12 (May-August)								
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
JUVENILES	**Residents**								
Wren	17	31	17	17	16	6	11	4	8
Dunnock	21	33	20	15	9	17	23	11	7
Robin	21	17	15	11	10	17	22	14	14
Blackbird	7	4	4	4	11	19	6	3	9
Song Thrush	4	2	1	2	3	3	5	4	-
Long-tailed Tit	8	-	-	4	10	10	2	6	-
Marsh Tit	3	3	-	7	1	5	1	2	1
Blue Tit	6	10	6	15	14	10	12	11	15
Great Tit	5	10	2	9	8	7	18	13	9
Treecreeper	1	1	3	2	1	-	1	2	-
Chaffinch	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Linnet	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	6	1
Bullfinch	9	7	2	2	2	4	5	13	7
RESIDENT TOTAL	**106**	**118**	**71**	**88**	**85**	**100**	**107**	**95**	**71**
	Migrants								
Nightingale	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-
Sedge Warbler	1	2	1	-	-	1	1	-	2
Reed Warbler	4	2	1	1	1	5	3	1	3
Lesser Whitethroat	6	7	-	7	5	2	4	4	4
Whitethroat	56	19	13	26	16	31	13	33	31
Garden Warbler	14	2	4	7	5	9	11	8	7
Blackcap	38	25	15	15	11	33	63	37	69
Chiffchaff	4	2	-	10	5	7	23	13	13
Willow Warbler	64	41	17	34	48	47	34	34	54
MIGRANT TOTAL	**189**	**102**	**52**	**103**	**91**	**136**	**153**	**132**	**184**
JUVENILE TOTAL	**295**	**220**	**123**	**191**	**176**	**236**	**260**	**227**	**255**

Table 6 shows the catch of juveniles for the whole of the May to August period, 12 catching sessions in all. It is much more difficult to draw conclusions from these results. In the first May/June week period, before migration starts, only small numbers of juveniles are caught. Clearly as some species are double or treble brooded we will only catch a proportion of their output; indeed some will still be producing broods beyond the end of the CES season. However, by the end of July/beginning of August other juveniles turn up on site that have clearly not bred locally such as Reed and Sedge Warbler, Grasshopper

Warbler and Redstart. Therefore amongst the local juveniles, must be a number of other juveniles that have moved in from the surrounding countryside or further afield. Numbers of juveniles are also more obviously affected by poor weather conditions, which may wipe out some seasons broods completely, as we have witnessed at Cissbury by a complete failure in the tit boxes on site after a late cold snap. It is intriguing that Nightingale appears in both the adult and juvenile tables. We have once heard them singing on site and very young spotty juveniles have been caught suggesting that breeding was very local. This is supported by independent field records submitted to the Sussex Ornithological Society of birds singing in May at Lychpole and Cissbury.

The absence of species such as Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting and other finches such as Goldfinch is a true reflection of their status at the Cissbury site. We rarely catch Corn Bunting although in some years when the crops are favourable they can be heard. Yellowhammer occurs irregularly and turns up in the net when cereal crops are planted in the adjacent field. Goldfinch has only occurred during the CES season once or twice.

Much more analysis can be done with the CES data but for the moment it remains an ambition until other domestic priorities have been dealt with!

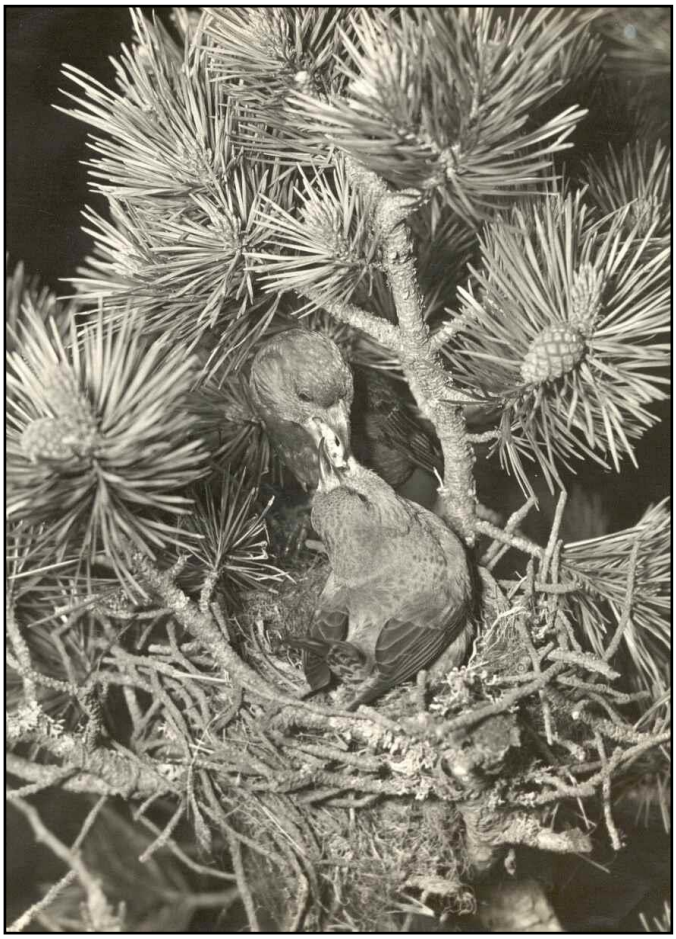


Peregrine – *John Reaney*

The observations

The ringing data provides a pretty comprehensive view of the small bird populations at Cissbury revealing some species that would otherwise have gone unnoticed to the casual observer. However records of the larger species, the ones that would bounce out of the net if they ever flew low enough, are dependent on field observations by the ringers. But often visiting birders see more than the ringers as they keep eyes forward and up whilst ringers have eyes down, focussing on processing the latest catch of birds. Resident birds, regularly observed using the hillside are; Jay, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Green Woodpecker, Tawny Owl, Wood Pigeon and Carrion Crow. Migrants include Cuckoo and Turtle Dove although records of the latter are becoming scarcer. Overhead autumn movements include Siskin, Redpoll, Brambling and Crossbill. Winter thrushes roost in the scrub and

Woodcock have been flushed by a mid-winter scramble along the hillside.



Crossbills – *Eric Hosking*

From our command-post view across the downland a wider range of species are observed. Feeding and loafing flocks of Corvids and Common and Black-headed Gulls would be expected but we see Cormorants, Canada Geese, various waders including the more expected Golden Plover. Lapwing sometimes breed within sight of our table. Quail are heard but not seen. Skylark and Meadow Pipit songs epitomise our downland location. Autumn brings Whinchat, Yellow Wagtails, and Wheatear along the fence posts and in the fields. Peregrine and Buzzard records increase and Hobby, Merlin and both Hen and Marsh Harrier have enlivened a ringing session. This is not a comprehensive list. John Newnham has kindly supplied me with an extract of all the SOS records for the Cissbury and Lychpole sites.

The grand total of species recorded is an impressive 125. There are some evocative species amongst the list. Cirl Bunting from 1981, Stone Curlew from the late 1970's and Tree Sparrow regularly from 1976 to 1990. Barn, Long & Short-eared and Little Owl have all been recorded in addition to Tawny Owl heard from the ringing site. Rarities have included Great Grey Shrike (1977 & 1998), Red-backed Shrike (1979, 1980 & 1983),

Tawny Pipit (1980), Wryneck and Golden Oriole (1988), Black Stork (1991) and Dartford Warbler (1999). Unexpected would be Jack Snipe (1976) and perhaps less so Mediterranean Gull (1990).

Stone Curlew – *John Reaney*

Conclusion

In a very belated response to the questions posed by Bernie in his 1981 article it seems likely that the peak numbers of birds that Bernie and others witnessed in the early 1980's were at a time when the habitat was at its optimum. What we ringers have recorded is a general decline in the numbers of birds using Cissbury as the habitat has evolved from scrub to woodland. The large regular autumn feeding parties we witnessed in those early years now rarely occur and are smaller. We have kept the numbers of both passage and breeding birds artificially high within the ringing site by the management work. But elsewhere on the Lychpole hillside breeding species such as Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat are being replaced by Blackcap, Chiffchaff and resident woodland birds at much lower densities.

The comparisons with the national picture are mixed. The annual number of Willow Warbler ringed has declined dramatically mirroring regional trends. Spotted Flycatcher is now an uncommon bird on the site and again we suspect this is not entirely due to habitat changes. On the other hand Bullfinch numbers continue to hold up well in contrast to national fortunes. Looking ahead the National Trust has indicated that they will be considering their management approach to the site in general but we have yet to learn the detail. We plan to ring for another year at least!

Acknowledgements

A very big thank-you is due to all past and present members of the Steyning Ringing Group whose commitment and dedication has enabled this report. All their names appear in John Newnham's ringing article. To Bernie Forbes for inspiring the Cissbury Ringing project in the first instance. To Vic Oliver and Glyn Jones of the National Trust for

permission to ring on the site and for modifying their own plans to accommodate our activities. To the volunteers who have assisted with the management work, particularly David Golds and Charles Hutcheon who gave many, many hours of their valuable time. To John Newnham for the supply of the SOS data. And finally to Brianne Reeve whose gentle persistence encouraged a reluctant author!

SDOS Notes *Phil Clay*

In the mid-1950s our family lived on the outskirts of Birmingham and my first memory of a bird was when my brother, Brian, found a Moorhen's nest down the lane from where we lived. We moved from Brum to Portslade in 1960. Brian, ever the optimistic one, bought some "Swoop" remember that? "Attracts all kinds of birds to the garden". Mum couldn't understand why any one would want to do that!

The move to Steyning came in 1963, a bird table was erected at some stage and the birds duly arrived, probably as the old lady up the road fed the birds as well. She lived there with her sister, at No. 13, we lived at No. 11, "next door, but one". All the houses had lovely long gardens, and the old man, Mr. Woodhams, who lived at No. 12, had the most overgrown garden of all, surrounded by privet hedges.

It was these hedges that proved a good source of income for the junior Clays. The ladies at No. 13 in particular, paying 2/6d (12.5p) an hour for gardening services: this must have helped pay for the peanuts. Squash and biscuits on the verandah were provided as refreshments and the conversations with Miss Forbes, O.B.E. (as later discovered), were mostly about birds, as we sat and watched the Blue Tits and other birds on the feeders hanging nearby.

She'd been a member of the Society from at least 1959, and Brian and I have to thank her for the kind gift of membership of the SDOS and the then YOC, a generosity that she kept up until her death, some years later.

I recall the Society Field trips, other outings, being ferried about by Dad and later by one particular member, a Mr. Beasley, who lived in the little olde worlde house at the top of Mill Road (Shoreham), Mr. Burstow usually navigating some tortuous route he had discovered by bicycle. Pagham Harbour seemed three times further away than it does now. The outings with the Society were the main birding events for us in the 60's and 70's, when winters were real winters and hardly anyone had a telescope. I remember one such day at East Head trying to watch Avocets in a blizzard; Dad was not very impressed with that particular outing!

Much time was spent exploring locally and cycling down to the Sanctuary to watch Mike Goddard and John Newnham doing the ringing. This was my introduction to Bird Ringing.

I discovered that ringing is not something you can just "do", as there is a tiered system of permits through which you have to progress. In order to participate you first need to find someone with an "A" Permit, plus a full trainer endorsement to sign you up as a trainee. Upon attaining a level of competence and after fulfilling a set of criteria and upon recommendation from the trainer, a "C" level permit allows the trainee to have some nets to operate solo, still under the control of the trainer. After another period of time, these days a couple of years minimum, the "C" permit holder can progress to "A" Permit and eventually to trainer status.

My training commenced with Barrie Watson at Chichester, in about 1967 as there was no room at the Sanctuary, John Newnham being preoccupied with the training of my brother Brian, and Colin Messer.

Many trips to the island ringing site at Ivy Lake in the Chichester Gravel pits followed, leaving on a Friday, after Barrie's surgery had finished, hurtling down the A27 in the Singer Gazelle, inflatable boat strapped to the roof, to set the nets ready for dawn, with the possibility of an evening catch of Swallows and Sand Martins. A weekend of ringing ensued with a final session on Monday morning before hurtling back in time for work.

Meanwhile, Graham Brown, a friend who lived at No. 15, and I formed a bird group at school, we called it the "Steyning Grammar School Natural History Society" to avoid embarrassment, and we found our own "Sanctuary" to study and manage. It was "discovered" one day about 1969 when I was following the machines that were ripping the track up from the bed of the old Steyning Railway, from the Kings Barn Lane bridge at the sewage works southward, and stumbled through an area of reed bed and woodland. Only later did I realise that this would make an excellent study area, when we formed that school group.

It was agreed that I should approach the farmer, a Mr. Strivens, so this I did. The door to his bungalow opened and a tall man leaned on the door frame and listened quietly to my request. "Can't imagine that would be a problem," came the reply, "though you'd better come in off the railway, and not all come traipsing through my farmyard."

Net rides were made with all the enthusiasm of ringers with a new ringing site. Recording the birds was done regularly and other wildlife was noted intermittently. Our Geography teacher at the time was a Mrs Chelmick, whose husband David was coincidentally secretary of the Sussex Ornithological Society, and with his help management plans were devised and these shown to and approved by Mr. Strivens, "That would be alright." Reed Bed Management had begun. Soon, as was necessary, membership of the county society followed and contact with the legendary Alf Simpson made, and the awesome power of the Sussex OS working parties was brought to bear on the unsuspecting reeds. One year we managed to virtually drown the lot, by cutting them too short, and then being flooded for the winter. Not as bad though as the chap at Charleston Reedbed in the Cuckmere, who managed to burn his reedbed down! Much was learnt by working with Alf on many working parties from Rye Harbour to Chichester Harbour, and a lot of fun at the same time.

I had gained my "C" Permit entitling me to ring on my own and The "Strivens Reed Bed" became my ringing site. I progressed to "A" permit standard and that of "trainer" status. Meanwhile Brian obtained his "C" from John and with a number of others lining up for training the "Steyning Ringing Group" was formed to co-ordinate the ringing in the area with myself acting as secretary. The first meeting was held at Barrie Watson's house. Along with Barrie, for guidance and support, and Brian, the group included four trainees, Mike Hall, Tim Oldham, Graham Brown and Jonathon Cooke. Unfortunately, other commitments eventually took them away from Steyning. I was now working in Lewes, and in the 70's Mike Hall formed another bird group at the school, and I was kindly invited along to their meetings and joined their outings. Two of the members were known to me and had already been involved with the ringing group, Dave King and Duncan Heryett. We had some splendid trips including two weekends camping at a pig farm in Suffolk whilst visiting the Minsmere and Walberswick Reserves!

It was ringing that introduced me to Bird Observatories, and it was on my return from one such trip where I had been voluntarily employed as relief warden on the Welsh island of Bardsey, that a bombshell was dropped. I had driven back from North Wales over night in my Triumph Herald, after mending a flat tyre and a flat battery, and just pulled up at home

at 7.00 am when Dave King appeared and said "sorry to hear about the bad news." "What bad news?" "You've not heard about the reed bed?" "No." "We've been kicked out!" So that was that. In 1978 part of the Steyning By-Pass was proposed to be built through Mr. Strivens farm and he didn't want the bother of having us on his land when a large section was being requisitioned for road building.

It was just about this time that the old cuttings to the north of the Reed Bed on the railway line had been in-filled with refuse, and these, and the old Steyning tip that lay adjacent to the railway embankment, opposite and south of Strivens reed bed, had come to the end of their life. SRB lay on the west of the line with a section of reed within the railway embankment fence. The west embankment slope itself being covered with predominantly bramble and with some willow, ash and hawthorn clumps. The eastern side was of a more wooded scrub nature, and with a small area of wet pasture along side, the whole extending to 2.5 acres. It appeared that we could operate on the land and the County Council gave permission to erect gates and fences. Duncan Heryett's father owned the farm to the east and had a tenancy on the wetland. This he willingly gave up and in 1980 the Council was approached to see if the area could be purchased. It could be, and was!

Miss Forbes had passed away by now and there were new occupants in No. 13, the Russell family. Gerry, worked for the County Council as land fill manager. Not only that, he had a friend who had a Plant Hire company, who had a couple of diggers working on the Steyning By-pass. Useful! I thought that I would like a pond in the wetland and arrangements were made for some weekend work for one of the diggers for a gratuity of a couple of bottles of Gin! Gerry's son, Ian, was often a companion at the ringing site and working parties. A lot of other planting was done, with Willows transplanted around the pond. Alders came via Charlie Coleman at Woods Mill, and reeds were transferred from the reedbed side to the Mumbles. Within a few years these had covered the whole pond, which, as it dries out in summer didn't matter one bit. Now we have 6 to 10 pairs of Reed Warbler, and Water Rail there. The willows need to be coppiced every year.

The Mumbles was born. Well, not exactly. The name was discovered in the deeds, and was adopted for the site, but may well have been a corruption of the name "Mumbrels Marsh," from an earlier period, perhaps when the land formed part of the Wiston Estate. The site gained runner up prize in the County Council's 1982 conservation award scheme, which was a very nice little accolade for all the hard work and for all concerned.

That was fine, but where were the birds? The 240 foot net ride in our bit of the reed bed produced 117 Reed Warblers in 1981, but little else besides. David and Duncan both took on trainee Permits, and Ron Little another "A" permit holder came in as did Martin Sutherland an "A" permit holder, (who since moved to Bardsey and has recently been leading holidays to the U.S.A. for Naturetrek). I had moved out of the family home to a house share in Upper Beeding, where Martin Banks resided, whom I met on a S.O.S working party, he too took up traineeship. But there were not enough birds to ring as the habitat was yet to develop.

Reed Warbler – *John Reaney*

Another site was needed and with a bit of admiration and envy sneaking in from seeing the Beachy Head Ringing Station in operation, a downland site of (hopefully!) equal merit was sought. Inspired by Bernie Forbes' article in the 1981 SDOS report, the Cissbury area was surveyed, and a site near the car park looked a possibility. Permission was unfortunately not forthcoming from the landowner. Correspondence was limited to contact with the landowner's solicitors, which is not the best approach, personal contact being preferable. It was reported that the owners held the view that the birds' interests were best served by being left alone.

However, some of the North Slope along to Lychpole was owned by Worthing Council and tenanted by a Mr. Granshaw, whose son Richard, had been a member of the Sh.O.S, and a trainee of Barrie Watson's. Well of course as you can imagine, we set to work making net rides in summer 1984. At the start of the project the group included Brian, Martin who now had a "C" permit and Chris Fox who had just joined as helper/trainee, and Dave King returned on occasions.

Attention to the Mumbles waned as Cissbury fever caught hold. An abortive attempt to start up a C.E.S. (Constant Effort) at the Mumbles site failed due to lack of interest, and after a couple of years the net rides at that site were amended to allow for a one man operation. David and Duncan had left the area on studies and later for employment. In the late 1980's other ringers moved into the area and joined the Group, Bill Woodford, Val Bentley and Ralph Hartfree all boosted the Cissbury site, but Martin had since moved east and became involved at Beachy Head.

This line up of the group has continued through the 90's till now, although Bill's tragic death in a car crash in 1996 was a blow to us all, both sites were back in full production and now there are three new trainees as well. David rejoined full-time, recommenced his training, and now has a "C" permit, and spends a lot of time ringing on his employment area, Ashdown Forest, where he is a Ranger. Without his efforts with the chain saw at Cissbury, that site would have become over grown and unusable. Other problems affect both sites, not the least the proposal that the adjoining land to the south of the Mumbles becoming a Quad bike track!

Open days at the Mumbles followed the award of first prize to the Mumbles in the S.O.S's Margaret Millner award scheme in 1994 and are now an annual occurrence, for both Societies.

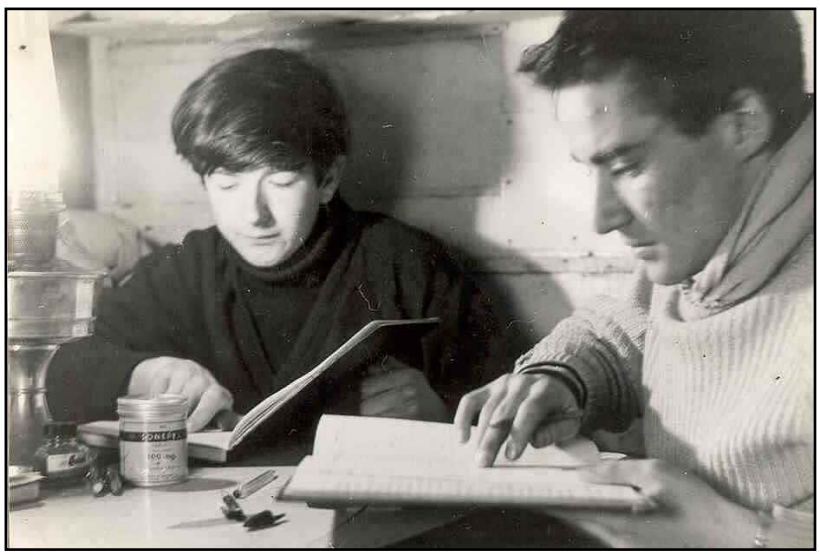
Being involved in ringing has taken me to many places and to see and study birds in the hand that most birdwatchers would find difficult to see. It was the Shoreham Ornithological Society I have to thank for that introduction. Regular visits back to Bardsey, and only recently I have spent four weeks in The Gambia, ringing, and two weeks at Birdlife, Malta's observatory on the Island of Comino. That was hard work, but thoroughly enjoyable and contributing in each respect if, only in a small way, something, to the Ornithology of those places.

Birdwatching and ringing in the 1960s *Mike Goddard*

Although I was not born in Sussex and have long since moved away, I consider Shoreham as my original home. We moved to Shoreham in 1956 when I was seven years of age, my grandmother lived in Portslade where my father was born and brought up, and my parents continued living in Shoreham up until 1973, long after I had left. Our home was 34 Mill Hill, right on the edge of the South Downs and just a short distance from the Shoreham Bird Sanctuary. It was an idyllic place to be a youngster and it soon became obvious that I

had a keen interest in wild life in general and birds in particular. It was therefore no coincidence that Katherine Biggs ('Miss' Biggs to me in those days) who lived opposite with her sister and brother Captain Jack Biggs, identified and nurtured this fledgling interest. I well remember being invited to search for birds' nests in the hedges of her garden and being rewarded with a wealth of bird life right on my doorstep. She encouraged me to keep a record of the location of these nests for future reference. I held Katherine Biggs in great awe and respect; she was a kind and considerate lady who must have had immense patience to deal with a 9 year old such as me. Indeed it was she who eventually decided that I was outgrowing nest hunting in her garden and introduced me, with the support of my parents, to the Shoreham Ornithological Society. Although I took it for granted at the time, Shoreham was an ideal spot for bird watching. With the sea on its doorstep, the harbour, the River Adur and its flood plains and tidal inlets, the chalky expanse of the South Downs mostly uncultivated in those days, and of course the isolated copse of trees and bushes of the Bird Sanctuary, must all have been recognised by the early founders of the Shoreham Ornithological Society as ideal spots to attract a wide variety of bird species both breeding and transitory.

The year must have been 1959 and I was in my last year at St Nicholas Primary School. I was allowed to attend Society outings as long as I was accompanied by my father. Alfred always supported his childrens' (I had a brother and sister) interests and it must have been quite a commitment for him to spend weekends trudging around various parts of Sussex in pursuit of birds. I think my very first outing was to a heronry in the Adur valley. It was an inspiring experience at the time although such a serious venture for adults was not really considered to be appropriate for a young lad of 10! Other outings further afield to Sidlesham and Wittering, encouraged me to occasionally go it alone and when I could persuade my father to take me I visited Selsey Bill for early morning sea watches under the watchful eyes of Tony Marr and Richard Porter.



Mike Helps and Richard Porter completing the log at Selsey – *Richard Porter*

The highlight of these early outings was a visit to Selsey one weekend to watch a Desert Wheatear and another outing to see a Red Spotted Bluethroat. However, my heart was not really in locating and identifying rarities in the field and in the subsequent years I always felt much more comfortable and at home netting and ringing birds. It always fascinated me to think that I was doing my little bit to building up a picture of the migratory habits of birds. Indeed, early success came with a Starling ringed in my garden which turned up in Poland and this type of movement inspired me to continue the quest for further overseas recoveries.

At around this time (1960) two events occurred which steered me towards what was to consume all my spare time for the next 8 years.

Firstly I was introduced to Dr John Stafford, who happened to also live opposite me at Mill Hill. He gave me a chance to develop my interest in bird ringing and invited me to the Bird Sanctuary. I vividly remember turning up for my first ringing session, which happened to be on a cold winter's evening at the thrush roost, in totally inadequate clothing (a plastic windcheater I recall). I think I went with my brother Paul and learnt that warm clothes and a flask of coffee were the first priorities of a bird ringer. I was 10 years of age and soon became totally obsessed with bird ringing. For the next 8 years I lived and breathed ringing at the Sanctuary.

The second significant event was my move to Steyning Grammar School for my secondary education. John Scragg was the Headmaster, Derek Drew my housemaster, and Mr Luker my Biology Teacher. Under Mr Scragg's stern discipline and Messrs Drew and Luker's kindly encouragement I flourished and thrived both academically and in extra-curricula activities. This happy and stimulating environment provided the platform for developing my main interests: bird ringing at the Sanctuary, collecting moths and butterflies on the Downs and using mercury vapour night lamps, and athletics at the Brighton and Hove Athletic Club. In addition it was in Steyning that I met John Newnham, a boarder at the School who subsequently took over the reins at the Sanctuary. John and I formed a close friendship, based almost entirely on our shared passion for bird watching and bird ringing, and it was in the early 60s that I introduced John to the Bird Sanctuary and he accompanied me on many a ringing session both at Shoreham and further afield. John's possession of 'wheels' in the form of a scoter (Ed. Scooter!) opened up our horizons and trips to the Chichester gravel pits and other ringing venues became a regular occurrence. Indeed, I still bear a facial scar gained after one particular outing when this overloaded means of transport blew a front tyre and tipped its occupants across the road. It was after this incident that I decided four wheels were safer than two and I endeavoured to pass my driving test at the earliest opportunity.

Under John Stafford's close scrutiny and patient teaching I rapidly progressed and soon gained my BTO ringing licence. His vast experience and knowledge of birds and ringing were a constant inspiration to me. John Stafford had a keen ear for bird calls and songs; my youthful inquisitiveness and his willingness to teach soon had me learning fast. I recall the day he identified a Tree Sparrow at the Sanctuary by its call alone. I was amazed that he could tell a single bird just by its call, from an orchestra of background bird noise. I never forgot that day or that call – even if the Tree Sparrow as a species has now long since departed the Sanctuary.

I am sure that the Sanctuary has changed almost beyond recognition from those early days of the 60s. Corn Buntings were common and could be found amongst the shrubs towards the top of the hill. Snipe were always to be found in the waterlogged meadows in winter and the thrush roost was large and predictable. We used to set the nets about one hour before dusk outside the perimeter fence and along mostly the north side of the copse. However, the exact positioning depended on the prevailing wind which had to be at right angles to the nets and this we could judge on our way down to the Sanctuary by watching the direction of the smoke from the Shoreham Cement Works chimney. We also became expert at judging the strength of the wind by the speed and angle of movement of the smoke. The late afternoon was invariably bitterly cold and our fingers were always numb. We became adept at extracting the blackbirds from the net in the winter's dusk, with frost on the ground and a biting wind in our face. In the early days we did not have the relative luxury of the hut to take shelter in, and it was not until 1961 that the hut was built and taking the catch back to the relative warmth of the hut, weighing and ringing the birds and releasing them into the nearest bush, became our winter routine. I would rush back from school on a Wednesday lunch time, gulp down a quick lunch of spaghetti on toast, and walk the five hundred yards up Mill Hill and then down to the Sanctuary to set the nets before the thrush roost started; on a short winter's day this could be as early at 2.30pm. If it were the weekend we would also use the heligoland trap. With a natural water spring at its entrance which was always ice free, and plenty of bait in the form of peanuts and bird seed, we would regularly trap tits and the occasional Snipe and Moorhen that ventured in on the coldest of days when the fields were frozen over. In addition we would have time to set nets within the bounds of the copse itself and have a chance of netting additional species such as Long Tailed Tits, Greenfinch and Tree Sparrow.

Summers were a much more relaxed and enjoyable time at the Sanctuary, and started with the spring migration in April. If the weather were warm and calm we would set the nets not only within the copse but also along the line of the bushes which delineated the field edges. Gentle beating along these hedge lines drove the birds into the nets and our half-hourly beat and inspection often produced results with significant numbers of Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat. Autumn of course produced the same, but in lesser concentrations, as the migrants made their way back south for the colder months. If we felt a little despondent on the less productive days we boosted our morale with the thought of a rarity; after all it was only a couple of years before that a Barred Warbler had been netted at the Sanctuary.

In the 1960s the Sanctuary comprised mainly hawthorn and willow scrub and trees. The trees were tall enough in the centre to provide shade and a natural place for the hide, and in 1961 the wooden hut, which overlooked the predominately willow and reeds marshy area. It was dominated by the outflow of water from the waterworks which used to keep the main stream constantly supplied although it occasionally pumped out excess water in large quantities which meant constant vigilance on where the nets were placed; the centre of the copse could rapidly become immersed in a couple of feet of flood water. The surrounding fields comprised the flood plain of the River Adur and were used by local farmers for cattle grazing. The field to the immediate north of the copse was the only cultivated area and grew wheat or barley every year and, at the far end where there was a small clump of trees, was the home of a family of badgers. The slopes to the north east of the copse were steep, uncultivated and covered in downland turf. They were full of

butterflies in summer and well known for the chalkland species of blues, fritillaries, and skippers. The steep slopes to the immediate east of the copse were covered with low hawthorn scrub although towards the end of the 60s young sycamore trees were beginning to appear.

Mist nets could be set in several places, depending on the species being targeted. Within the copse we used a short 20 foot net directly behind the hut where we had built a railway sleeper bridge across the stream which led from the front of the heligoland trap and which attracted many species down to the stream to drink, including Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet and House Sparrow. Another 20 foot net could be set in the north west corner within the hawthorns, to catch roosting thrushes in winter or feeding warblers in spring and autumn. In the very centre of the copse, directly in front of the hut, we could set a 60 foot plus a 40 foot net amongst the willows to catch mainly the summer migrants. Outside the copse, depending on the prevailing wind direction and targeting the winter thrush roost we would set a number of 60 and 40 foot nets parallel to the line of the copse. These would catch the roosting Blackbird, Song Thrush, Redwing and Fieldfare. The fields themselves were too exposed for netting, although we would occasionally set single, short nets low down above the dykes to catch the snipe or waders.

Fieldfare – *John Stafford*

In those days there was a very small band of regulars visiting the Sanctuary. John Stafford visited less and less as his work and other activities took him away. David Stone and Tony Marr, a few years older than me, must have been the very first trainees and I followed in their footsteps. Tony Marr quickly went on to greater things in the ornithological world and throughout the early 60s it was mainly David Stone and I who kept ringing alive at the Sanctuary. David was also a keen ringer of Mute Swans and, together with his helper Andrew Gagg, could be seen on the Adur River with his waist high waders in the mud chasing the swans. I remember introducing and training others in the challenges of ringing

at the Sanctuary: Colin Hitchman, Chris Leach, Colin Messer and Brian Clay. Dr Barrie Watson also joined in 1966 although he became very involved with ringing at the Chichester gravel pits and other venues further afield. Visitors to the Sanctuary were mainly the small band of bird ringers and part of our routine would be to tour the copse, the surrounding fields, the grassed hillside, and finally the shrubby part of the hillside immediately above the waterworks. Other visitors included Joseph Twort and Frank Severs who were making their regular rounds of key bird haunts in Shoreham. We would swap observations before making our entries in the Sanctuary log.

It was also at this time that John Newnham joined me at the Sanctuary. As a close friend of mine from Steyning Grammar, John became passionately interested in ringing and he was soon a strong supporter of the Shoreham ringing group. Indeed, as I myself moved away, firstly to University in 1967 and then to Kenya in 1970, John took over and it is only very recently that I have re-established contact and discovered, to my delight, that ringing at Shoreham continued with such vigour, even if the Sanctuary inevitably become less of an attraction for migratory birds as the habitat matured and changed with the modernisation of the pumping station and the natural growth of the trees and shrubs.

It was in these later years at Swansea University that I met Rob Hume, a talented bird watcher and bird artist who later became editor of the RSPB magazine Birds, and who has kindly written an article in this book for the Shoreham Ornithological Society's Golden Jubilee.

Although my time at Shoreham in the 1960s was dominated by bird ringing at the Sanctuary there were many other birding activities that come to mind. The harsh winter of 1962/63 was particularly memorable. This was perhaps the peak of the thrush roost at the Sanctuary but also produced other quite remarkable occurrences. Mist netting in a kale patch just near the centre of Shoreham produced concentrations of finches and brambling, and I well remember other dramatic effects of the prolonged cold spell. The Adur froze over just below the Bramber bridge and John Newnham and I spent many hours walking the banks of the river counting the dead gulls. Indeed, I recall taking some of the fresh corpses back to the Biology Lab at school (or was it John's dormitory!) and skinning and stuffing them in the interests of science. Starling roosts that winter were a spectacular sight and I was once invited to join a youthful Chris Mead (now of national and BTO fame) to net Starlings at a large roost in the downs above Portslade. It was an awesome experience for a 13-year old to watch Chris at work and the dusk aerial displays followed, if luck was on our side, by the descent into the mist nets of tens of thousands of Starling; an experience never to be forgotten.

Ringing also took place in our back garden at 34 Mill Hill. This was predominately using a chardonneret trap which relied on the bird, usually a tit or finch, alighting on an internal stick which sprung the lid and thence trapped the bird inside. Other more basic contraptions were based on an upturned wire basket propped up by a stick to which was tied a long string to a vantage point inside the house. Ground feeding birds such as thrushes and starlings would wander into the baited area and the trap sprung by pulling the string – a basic but effective method. Other traps comprised a funnel entrance which allowed the bird to enter the baited cage but prevented it exiting. I also recall an early form of clap or 'whoosh' net being used.

My other passion was sea watching at the east end of Widewater, on Shoreham Beach. 4am on spring mornings would see me cycling to Widewater, to a particular beach hut and setting up watch on the passage migrants and passing sea birds. Breakfast was a loaf of bread and slab of cheese from the store across the footbridge. The sea watch was inspired by Tony Marr's documentation of similar activities here a few years previously, although he went on to develop his sea watching skills at Selsey Bill and Beachy Head. In hindsight I was too young to be able to contribute much. I think my imagination played a few tricks and my submission of a Velvet Scoter sighting to the Sussex Records Committee was rightly viewed with a degree of scepticism. However, our patience was rewarded with occasional views of Gannet, passing Common Scoter, and Oyster Catcher; although we were never blessed with the volume of interesting species that could be observed at Selsey due to its strategic position for migrants but it was good fun at the time and, more importantly, close to home when my only means of transport was the bicycle.

When I left for University in 1967 I could only continue ringing at Shoreham during the vacations and, inevitably, my involvement dwindled. It finally ceased in 1970 when I went to Kenya and my parents moved away from Shoreham. In the intervening years I have often looked back on those years as some of the happiest of my life. Although I have not become a professional in the ornithological world as have Tony Marr, Chris Mead, Richard Porter or Rob Hume, I have applied the skills, attitudes and disciplines learnt during those years to stand me in good stead for subsequent careers in teaching and the Royal Air Force. Indeed, this almost obsessive pursuit of a single goal has characterised my attitude to life and culminated in my current career as a business entrepreneur. Hopefully, however, I will find more time to revisit those early haunts and make contact with some of the other pioneers of ornithology in the Shoreham District. Certainly, contributing to the SDOS 2003 Golden Jubilee has been a pleasure and re-awakened an interest in Shoreham and its birds. I wish all the current members great success and enjoyment and can only hope that some of them continue the Shoreham traditions of nurturing and training youngsters in the skills and pleasures of bird watching and ringing.

STORIES FROM THE BEGINNING

My older brother had a Ladybird book *Rob Hume*

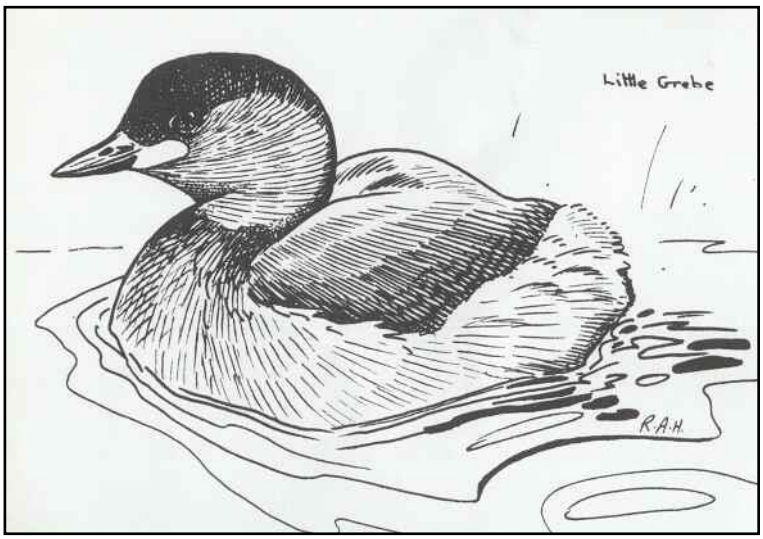
My older brother had a Ladybird book of birds, with some fine full page pictures of birds such as the Yellowhammer and Bullfinch in it. I well remember being enchanted by these bright and exotic looking birds with such interesting names: from the very beginning, the names of birds meant a great deal: Redwing, Brambling, Yellowhammer. Words, pictures and hopes of one day seeing the real thing all became inextricably combined in whatever it was that got me hooked on birds.

In the bookshop in Lichfield was a whole shelf of small, neat, nearly identical white-covered books with shiny pages that smelled lovely and covered subjects that I liked. The Observers books were collectable and informative and between us we soon had Birds, Birds Eggs, Wild Flowers, Fish and Mammals as well as Railway Locomotives (steam, of course), Ships and Aircraft. Many years later, I was privileged to write my first book, the first rewrite of Observer's Birds. It was impossible, of course, to maintain the charm of the

original by S Vere Benson, with pictures by Thorburn, Kuelemans and others, in a new book with my text and photographs.

It has often been said that innocent egg collecting turned many a boy into a birdwatcher. Several boys collected eggs (I often think we were better nest finders at five years old than I have ever been since) but only one of them, the one with the smallest collection (a tin box with about 10 eggs in it) carried on to watch birds: that was me. The rest quickly forgot about it and being a birdwatcher at school was then quite difficult. I didn't talk about it much!

I was lucky to have two older cousins (both very much still birdwatchers and highly expert) far away in Essex who helped expand my interest. They both drew and painted birds well, and I tried to do the same. I copied them in other ways, keeping diaries as they did (in a form that has hardly changed since) and writing letters about what I had seen. I spent some time in Essex in school holidays and later we went on holidays together in Scotland. There is still no better way to learn birds than to be out and about with someone who knows them already, but I also somehow learned a lot by being out on my own, by trial and error, by exploring and working things out for myself. I looked at their field guides and chose to buy Collins Pocket Guide by RSR Fitter and RA Richardson: I didn't appreciate the great qualities of Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom until a year or two later.



Little Grebe - *Rob Hume*

It was only recently that I first met Richard Fitter. We talked about Richard Richardson, whom I had just met briefly on Cley's east bank, and I said I was always sorry not to have an original 'RAR' drawing. A few weeks later, in the post, I was amazed to find a small lapwing drawing on white card that Richard had dug out and sent to me. As to Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom, we had all three at the RSPB's members' weekend when a new edition of their guide came out (organised by Crispin Fisher) and I had the great good

fortune to be the 'driver' for Roger and Virginia Peterson for a week during their short lecture tour in England. There are occasionally very special perks to an RSPB job.

Back to my early days, I joined the RSPB (missing out the YOC) at 14 and learned of the West Midland Bird Club – I don't quite know how – and joined that. It was also possible, then, to buy British Birds each month from W H Smith, with a regular order, and I began many years of association with that journal at about the same time: eventually I was one of its editors as well as Chairman of the British Birds Rarities Committee. So I was reading Bird Notes (before it changed to Birds), BB and the WMBC bulletins and bird reports and found a number of bird books in the school library. Why I don't know, but the school began to collect volumes of Bannerman's Birds of the British Isles and even had a set of the great Witherby Handbook. I seemed to be the only pupil who ever opened them. Alongside them, too, was a slim, green volume, The Birds of Staffordshire by Lord and Blake, not much more than an annotated list, but it mentioned birds at Cannock Reservoir quite a lot.

Now Cannock Reservoir was better known to me as Norton Pool, a place I had been visiting for years, with a favourite uncle, fishing for perch and roach. It was renamed (for commercial reasons) Chasewater and was to play a huge part in my development as a birdwatcher and (in a small way) all round naturalist, as it was a great place for birds and also had many interesting plants and high populations of butterflies. It has since been turned into a horribly anaesthetised country park, and is currently being damaged by the building of the Birmingham North Orbital road across its shore, so I can't bring myself to go back for the moment, but over the years I kept notes on more than 2,000 visits.

It was, in my early days, quite a remote and wild place, high and exposed and often very rough indeed, with plenty of bog, heath and mining spoil as well as the waterside and lake itself. I got to know every bush, every territory of Grasshopper Warbler and Whinchat, Snipe and Little Ringed Plover. It just needs an old Beatles record to play somewhere to transport me, instantly, to the shores of Chasewater, plodding round with my bike through deep snow, looking for a Goldeneye or two. Oddly, since disturbance has increased tenfold and water skiers and powerboats have dominated the lake, numbers of wildfowl have risen enormously. But the loss of the rough ground, the bog, the old hawthorn hedges, the grassy embankments and all the other wild habitat to sweeps of sterile green has meant a sad loss of many of its birds as well as much of the plant and insect life.

In the course of my visits to Chasewater I bumped into a couple of other birdwatchers: and the first I got to know was Tony Blake, co-author of that slim volume on Staffordshire's birds. An author! I could hardly believe my luck. For a while I used to try to spot Tony's car and predict which way he had walked around the reservoir, so that I could walk the other way and 'accidentally' meet him. I did the same with Eric Clare and Alan Dean and Paul Hyde: I had no other way of meeting fellow enthusiasts. I didn't even know who they were, but the Bird Club bulletin came to my aid here. Its monthly reports concluded with a list of contributors: I was proud to see my name appear from time to time, but more importantly I could see who else was mentioned and somehow work out who I might be seeing. In the Annual Report, there were more clues as initials were put against individual records and so I could pin people down more precisely. It would have been easier to ask, of course, but I never said much, even then.

So here was a combination of encouragement from my parents, an uncle who took me out fishing and wandering in the countryside, a good place a few miles from home, relatives who were birdwatchers, a love of books and membership of the RSPB and my local bird club. It was a heady mix and my long term course was clearly set: I was into birds, in a big way.

Now, people see 400 species in Britain in a year and beginners knock up 400 on the British list with amazing speed. I remember going to university in Swansea having seen barely 200 species: 'he's seen 200 species and still hasn't seen white-fronted goose' was a comment I remember well! Of course I hadn't – where would I have seen a White-Fronted Goose, for goodness sake? I had hardly travelled, even in England, beyond my usual family and Scottish holiday trips. When I first went to the Isles of Scilly I hadn't seen a passerine rarer than a Firecrest, but I had found my first rarity or two for myself. The first was a summer plumage White-winged Black Tern, so I could hardly have missed it, although it was on a loch in Caithness!

Chasewater and Blithfield Reservoir, the other, bigger, South Staffordshire reservoir that I watched regularly, served me well. There were many great days: lists of birds I saw hardly impress now, but the impact was huge. Seven Eiders at Chasewater! A Great Northern Diver that stayed for a fortnight and was replaced the very next day by a Black-throated. A Hoopoe in November! Dozens of evenings watching Glaucous and Iceland Gulls in the roost. And there were some really good ones, too, from Crane and Mediterranean (rare then) and Sabine's Gulls at Blithfield to Red-Footed Falcon and Least Sandpiper at Chasewater. The Least was by far my best find, but more amazing, so unexpected and still astonishing really, was a Cory's Shearwater that I found on the shingle shore one October day in 1971.

You can see that I was what might now be called a 'patch worker'. I wrote a long 'paper' on Chasewater's birds in the West Midland Bird Report and for a long time went there and saw more there than anyone else, and it was great. Its ruination since, in my eyes, pains me greatly.

This concentration on certain areas continued while I was in Swansea, where I lived for six years, apart from the long vacations. Blackpill was my patch, then, but it had already been the regular patch (one of many) for Bob Howells for many years. Bob still counts the waders and wildfowl of Blackpill and the Burry Inlet with undiminished enthusiasm and regularity. It was a bit prickly at first – my counts were sometimes bigger than his! – and sometimes I saw birds that he didn't, and vice versa. But we got along well in the end. There was a good bunch of people there during my stay: Keith Vinicombe and Martin Davies (of British Birdwatching Fair fame) are the two names that stand out now, but there were several birdwatchers and we formed a college ornithological society. With Robin Woods doing all the planning we even mounted a small 'expedition' to Clare Island off the west coast of Ireland to do the seabird census for Operation Seafarer in 1969. The west of Ireland was full of Corncrakes then: it is shocking to see how empty of them it is now.

After Swansea I was fortunate enough to be picked up from nowhere by the RSPB's then Wales Officer, Roger Lovegrove. Martin Davies and I began on the same day in April 1976, working for the RSPB on a short-term contract, counting and mapping upland birds in mid Wales. Martin had the Elan Valley, I had the Berwyns to deal with. What a summer it was: endless hot sunny days and all those wonderful upland birds, Hen Harriers, Merlins, Peregrines, Ring Ouzels, Black Grouse, Curlews, Whinchats and so on. Some have done well since then, others have declined. Martin and I still work in adjacent office buildings.

Female Merlin – *Roger Wilmshurst*

Roger found money to employ me for the winter, too, and then the following summer when I was roaming the hills of Radnor. But this had to end sometime and I had to get a job, so I applied for one at The Lodge with the RSPB as librarian. I didn't get it: Ian Dawson did, and he still is the librarian. But I was offered a job by Trevor Gunton in his department instead. In fact I had been to The Lodge to talk about jobs before, meeting Peter Conder (who subsequently was always ready to stop and talk whenever he visited The Lodge after his retirement, somehow remembering me from this meeting), James Ferguson-Lees and other luminaries. Now Trevor wanted me to work in his Development Department. Why? I had never done any public speaking in my life and couldn't imagine doing it, but I was suddenly on the bird club/members' group circuit and introducing RSPB film shows, to audiences of anything up to 2,000. It did me the world of good and I can never repay all I owe Trevor and his colleagues.

That changed after five or six years and I moved to become editor of Bird Life, the magazine of the YOC. Then I moved up to Birds, the magazine of the RSPB, and here I still am. It began in the era of typewritten copy, type pasted up onto boards and endless cutting and pasting to make things fit and has developed into an entirely computerised affair, with digital pictures, photo-shop manipulation, e-mails, websites and everything else we take for granted. But somewhere in there are the birds, the wonderful creatures that started it all off.

The worst thing about the job is the stream of press releases and daily summaries of media reports that shower us with desperately sad and bad news worldwide. I can't say I'm at all optimistic: I'm usually left feeling angry and helpless at yet another example of corporate greed and the inability of the human race to exercise any self control at all. Yet RSPB membership has increased from 200,000-odd to more than a million. The magazine today has a circulation in excess of 600,000 and a readership of 1.7 million. It is extraordinary really: but I wonder if it has the charm and ability to capture the imagination that the Ladybird book and Observer's Book did with me?

A tale of two birds *Bernard Forbes*

I moved down into Sussex in the early seventies renewing my birding passion and discovering pastures new. My father, Colin Messer and I started to birdwatch on the South Downs especially the part between Cissbury Ring in the south, Chantonbury Ring to the north and Steyning Round Hill/ Steepdown to the east. We soon realised that this site was very good for birds of prey, owls, winter finches and also in the spring and autumn migration. Good numbers of many species could be located with the right weather conditions prevailing. Within the first year of frequent visits we had built up a fair list of quality birds and we were covering this large tract of Downland weekly.

On the 11th March 1972, Colin Messer and I found a bird that changed my life. We had decided to visit No Man's Land, a valley in the central part of the area that we watched frequently. We did not go out until around late morning and made slow progress from Steyning Round Hill down the track to the valley bottom known as No Man's Land. Suddenly we were confronted as all hell broke loose with most of the local bird population erupting into a mass panic. We heard what we can only describe as a fairly loud whoosh, as

a bird flew very close to our position, pulling out of what had been a very high speed dive on its prey. Suddenly we saw to our amazement a huge white bird of prey flying right past us and over our heads. We looked at each other shouting, "Gyr Falcon" plus one or two other local Sussex words. Initially we were in a state of shock not really believing what we had just witnessed. We tried to rationalize our observation, was it just an albino Peregrine, or some other species? But no, it could only be one bird and we had got our identification right the first time. We did a little dance of glee and congratulated ourselves. What a bird to find on our local patch and one that we had never seen before!

Gyr Falcon – *John Reaney*

During the next few minutes we decided that we must try and seek help and find other observers to confirm our sighting. It was at least 30 minutes back to my car and another 30 minutes return journey to summon anyone else. The nearest was Richard Ives in Lancing. We drove at high speed to his house, fingers crossed that he would be at home. He was. I quickly filled him in on what we had seen and then dashed off to my home hoping to find my dad. This I did, and we raced back up the Downs, but all the effort was to no avail, the bird could not be located. By late afternoon the light was rapidly going and we had to give up the search. Feeling still elated but very disappointed that the others were unable to see this magnificent bird of prey. We told a few Sussex birders that evening. Many of them could not really believe what we had seen and we both hoped so much that this splendid species could be found the following morning.

That evening I had a date with my girlfriend and after a couple of small alcoholic beverages I was in a very happy mood. I then decided that this would be a good time to get down on bended knee and ask the young lady (while my luck was in) to marry me. The outcome of this little story is Carol said yes!

The Gyr Falcon was around the area until the 24th March, being seen by most of the Sussex birdwatchers of the time and causing what was then a massive twitch with people coming from all over the country. In fact the small road over the Downs was packed with visiting birdwatchers cars, every parking space being taken.

Carol and I have been together ever since and I have had a special relationship with raptors and women from that day on, well only one woman. Later on when we had children I did consider calling my son Gyr as some people call their offspring Peregrine or Montague but in the end I was overruled (or perhaps I never had the courage to mention this to my loved one). Just to add a footnote to this story, when I was in Norway last year and had seen my second Gyr Falcon, and I related this yarn to an American birder on the same tour. Being the old sage he was, he suggested that I did not go out that night or have any drink in case I found a pretty maiden and asked her hand in matrimony!

Our best birds *Jim and Judith Steedman*

In the Summer 1976 issue of the RSPB magazine Birds the following news item appeared:

Love finds a way, via Birds.

The small, energetic band organizing the Save a Place for Birds Appeal at The Lodge have dropped into a smooth routine to achieve the target figure of £1 million. But a cheque, which turned up for £100 caused quite a stir. It arrived after the appearance of a classified advertisement in Birds. The small-ad read:

"Quiet bachelor, 40, seeks young lady pen friend, companion. Interests countryside, music."
More than 20 replied to the advertisement and one proved to be more than just a pen friend. The quiet bachelor became a happy husband. In gratitude he sent £100 to the Appeal.
"We both felt that we would like to register our thanks in a tangible form for the great happiness you have brought to us both," he wrote in a covering letter. "In future, RSPB activities in general and this appeal in particular will hold an even more special place in our hearts."
Now you may wonder why this 26-year-old news item should still be of interest today, but if the events it describes had not happened we would not be able to sign ourselves Jim and Judith Steedman.

Memories of the sixties *Bernard Forbes*

I have been asked to try and remember a few of my first bird watching days. This has meant climbing up into the loft and searching for my very first log record book. Brushing off the dust there it was in my poor school boy style. Opening this old book it all suddenly came back, those distant but wonderful memories. It started in 1962, at the age of 13 struggling to come to terms with the fact that I was really interested in nature and especially birds. Was this normal I asked myself at the time? Difficult for a hormone busting teenager to take in and I guess that at my school it was not the norm!

I had just enrolled in the Society and knew little about birds or its members and I knew less about where to find them and how to recognise the different species. I was exceedingly keen and was not to be put off by the tweeds and brogues of many of the older members, or the formality and stuffiness of the indoor lectures. Birding then tended to be of a very local nature and such places as the Cuckmere or Pagham Harbour were exotic destinations beyond my pedal power. My local patches were Brooklands Lagoon, Widewater, and the area around the River Adur. I would try and visit these places as often as possible.

Bird guide books were not as they are today and often consisted of just paintings of the species at the nest. The book that I started out with was the Observer Book of Birds, which I thought was excellent at the time. Of course it never showed non-breeding or winter plumages or any of the various juvenile, first year types and there were no flight drawings, but it was all I had and it served me well. Buying a pair of binoculars was something that I could not afford and I made do with a pair of opera glasses that our old aunt had lent me. Many mistakes were made and the identification process was painfully slow having to work out many of the common species by trial and error. Not long after joining the Society as a junior member a friend of my father's, a very elderly gentleman gave him a pair of binoculars telling him that he was to give them to me because he knew I would use them and give them a good home. That evening my dad produced the binoculars.

Wheatear nesting at Widewater – *John Stafford*

With a beaming smile he handed them over and as you can imagine, I was delighted. They were a pair of Zeiss 7x50 binoculars from a captured German Submarine. I was convinced I could see France with them on a clear day. I had to learn to swagger with them, as they

were big and heavy. You could smell the metal and leather covering and feel the quality and solid construction. Overnight I had become a proper birdwatcher. The funny side to this story is that my dad had not taken up the hobby at this time, and it was not until about a year later that he did. Then he had to go out and buy himself a pair of cheap binoculars, there was no way he was going to get his hands on mine!

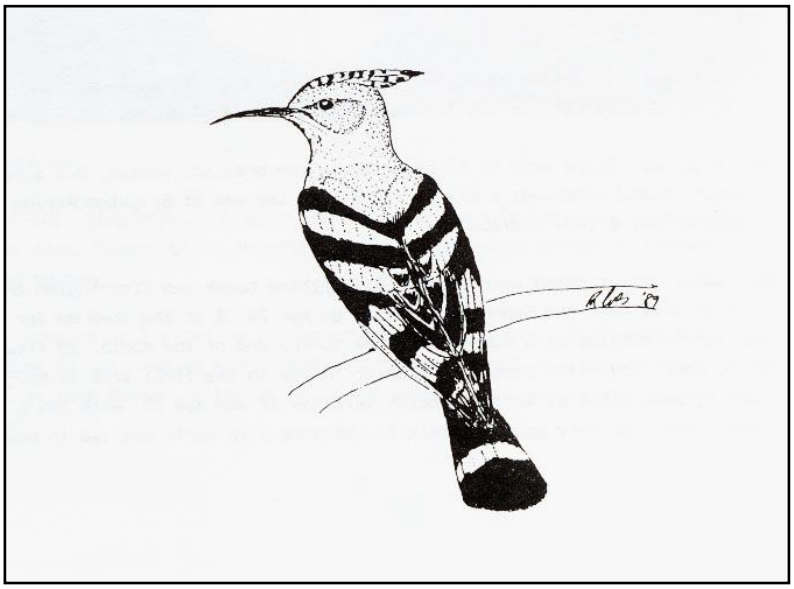
On my local travels I sometimes ran into a few of the old time birdwatchers of that period such as J.M. Twort, C.F. Brown and F.Severs to name just a few. They would often point me in the right direction and gently help me out on bird recognition. I soon began to find my own feet and very slowly started to record my sightings. My log book reads, "25th of May Widewater lagoon evening visit, found a Wheatear nesting in a rabbit burrow, putting my hand down the hole I touched the small chick, there was only a single bird. Standing back from the nest I watched both parents bring food to the burrow and scuttle down. This they repeated several times during my watch on them". I guess that would still be an exciting find by today's standards.

Another entry reads "Shoreham outing to the New Forest 2nd of June 1962". This was the big time for me departing from Worthing seafront at around 06:30 am, what an adventure. It must have taken us three hours to get there. On this visit I saw several new species including Sparrowhawk, Nuthatch, Woodlark and we were really lucky in flushing a Nightjar. I was in birding heaven! Who would have thought that I would take other birdwatchers to this place in years to come, showing them the Forest specialities. How times have changed. Another log entry reads, "18th of November 1962 railway embankment south side of Shoreham Airport, I found my first Little Owl being mobbed by a party of small birds in a hawthorn bush", exciting stuff for me then.

Water Rail – *Roger Wilmshurst*

In the very cold winter of 1963 during the months of January to March, I found flocks of Tree Sparrow and Brambling in our local area especially around the back of Brooklands Lagoon on the old rubbish dump. There was still a small marsh between the Lancing Carriage Works and the railway line. This area is the Lancing industrial estate today and you could find small parties of Teal and Snipe there in the winter. The first Jack Snipe and Water Rail were seen there too. Barn Owl would hunt the rough grassland in the late winter afternoons.

In those days we often fished and my dad had a small inshore fishing boat and fisherman's locker on the beach at east Worthing. My log reads, "9th April 1963 fishing from the beach opposite the golf course near Brooklands. Dad was peering out to sea with my binoculars, when I noticed a bird flying directly towards me coming in off the sea. I think I must have nearly pulled his neck off in my panic to get the binoculars in my grip. As I raised them and focussed I knew I was watching my very first rare bird that I had found. "HOOPOE"



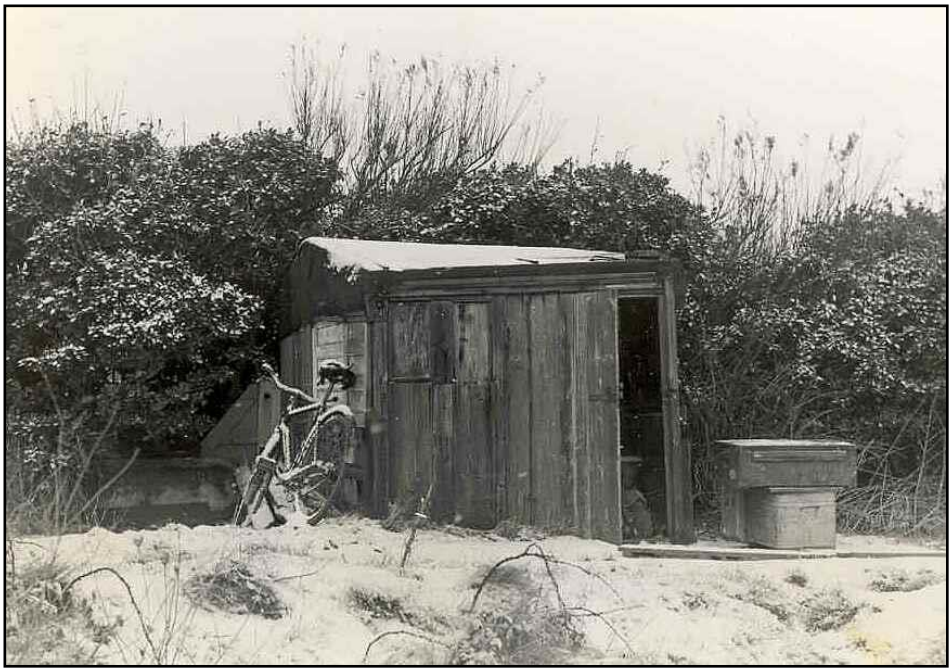
Hoopoe – *Richard Ives*

I shouted as it flew right over our heads up the beach and over the road. I raced up the shingle and managed to watch it fly over the golf course towards the far end of Brooklands. Determined to go after the bird I grabbed my bike and pedalled over the lush sward of the pitch and putt course. I can still hear ringing in my ears the yells of the green keeper and the bemused players. "Get off my grass you little s**" were lost to my ears.

I was on tracking mode and not a lot was going to get in my way. Playing a hunch I headed for the small marsh at the rear of the Carriage Works. Dumping the bike I walked along the small stream to an area of short turf and there before me the Hoopoe was feeding, probing its long curved bill deep into the ground looking for insects to gorge on after its

flight across the Channel and to cap it all the bird had its crest up in all its glory. What a stunning bird and a memory that is still alive to this day.

Another log entry reads, "29th September 1962 my first visit to Selsey Bill, a Shoreham field outing being led by Tony Marr. We found a Collared Dove. They were still pretty rare in those days and had not spread to many other parts of the County at that time. During the day we were suddenly confronted by a very excited Mike Shrubb, shouting at us that there was a ******* Barred Warbler just around the corner feeding in a hedgerow. We all rushed to the spot and there it was. This was in the days when Selsey Bill was a Bird Observatory and a daily log was kept of all birds seen. There was a very old hut on the tip of the Bill, on a disused plot of land, which was used as a base to sleep in when watching the area and to store all the camping gear etc. I never stayed in the hut but I do remember looking in the door. It appeared to go back a long way into a thick hedge. Inside it was full of old clothes, smelly sleeping bags and other odd bits of furniture and cooking utensils most of which were pretty ancient.



The hut at Selsey in snow 1964 – *Richard Porter*

The guys who occupied the hut were, in my eyes, bird watching legends although some of them were not much older than me, such names as Tony Marr and Richard Porter who went on to carve out careers within the birding scene in the UK and beyond.

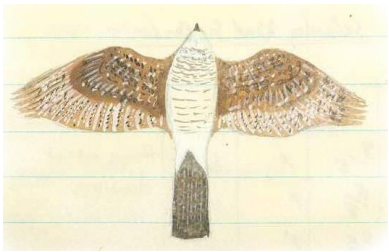
Further log entries read "A27 by Ricardo's Shoreham 28th November 1965". Dad and I were doing our normal circuit around the local area when we saw a small group of birdwatchers peering into the hedgerow by the roadside. We pulled up and had our first views of Waxwings feeding eagerly on hawthorn berries. There were three of them

ignoring us and the traffic. We came back later in the afternoon and found 5 birds there, seeing them so close was a real privilege.

During this period Twite could often be found on the Adur south of Cuckoo Corner, with up to 35 seen in the winter months. Unfortunately they have gone the same way as the Tree Sparrow and dramatically declined since that period. Luck was on my side in 1966. We received a postcard on Wednesday from Miss Biggs the secretary of our bird society, saying that over the weekend a Little Bittern had been seen at Steyning Mill pond. That evening Dad and I visited the pond and managed to have great views of the Bittern flying low over the lush vegetation, stunning!

On another day out to the Beachy Head area visiting various valleys we saw our first Ring Ouzels and a pair of Dartford Warblers. We both went home feeling rather chuffed with our day to the east of the County.

One of the features of my early birding years was the lack of Raptors. Of course I guess we had just gone through a period when all the birds of prey had suffered due to massive use of chemicals such as DDT and other pesticides and insecticides which had been used all over Europe. Record lows of many species were found and during this time I only saw a handful of Sparrowhawks and Common Buzzard with no records of Peregrine, Merlin, Hobby or Hen Harrier. Thank goodness things have improved to such a degree that many of these species have recovered and are at record highs at the present time.



Sparrowhawk – *Alan Kitson*

One raptor that broke the sixties pattern was a species from the high Arctic region the Rough-legged Buzzard. It was 14th February 1967 and we were on an outing to Amberley Brooks, when we heard that this species had been seen on the Downs near Chanctonbury Ring. Dad and I decided that we had better check this out on the way home. After a long climb up to the top of the Ring we started to scan around and soon located a large raptor hunting Well Bottom. Even to me, with little experience of many birds of prey, it was considerably different to our Buzzard. We confidently identified it as a Rough Legged Buzzard. It wasn't until many years later that I saw another one of these spectacular birds of prey.

In those days there were none of today's good quality telescopes to be found. All I had was a First World War brass and glass scope. You had to pull it out to about 1 metre in length then somehow rest it on your knees curled up in a very uncomfortable position, with your back leaning against a tree or gate post or try and find a steady object to rest it on. That is

where my Dad was very useful, as his shoulder made a good stand on many occasions. After all that, the view you had was next to useless, low magnification with very restricted field of view. Tripods really were not used because they were too heavy and cumbersome. So you soon realised that using your eyes to the maximum potential was essential. Maybe that's the reason why my eyesight is so well trained to look for movement and activity over long distance, then use the binoculars to home in and identify. It was not until the late seventies that I purchased the forerunner to the modern telescopes and tripod.

In 1967 I moved away from Sussex to work in London and spent the rest of the decade with my bird watching in a decline, although I used to come back to Sussex several times a year and we would try and go birding. On one of my visits Dad and I made a trip down to Pagham along the north wall . Out in the fields we found a new bird for both of us, Little Egret, again this was a major rarity only a few being seen every year in the UK. It would be another 19 years before I saw another in the county. Just look at the situation today with Little Egret ten times more common than Grey Heron in our local rivers and coastal harbours. At the start of the new decade I soon learnt that my heart was not in working away from the coast and Sussex, and moved back into our county in 1971.

First winter Black-headed Gull - *Roger Wilmshurst*

1953 onwards. A history of coincidences *Brianne Reeve*

In 1953, just as the Shoreham Ornithological Society was being formed I was taking my O' Levels at school in Middlesex. I asked my Biology teacher if I could answer the general question on birds which always appeared on the paper in those days. She tried to dissuade me as we had not been taught anything about birds. I offered to show her what I could do on a practice question and I was given permission to answer the question in the actual exam. I had to describe and contrast three different birds from different habitats. I learned later that my response to this question was the only reason I passed the exam!

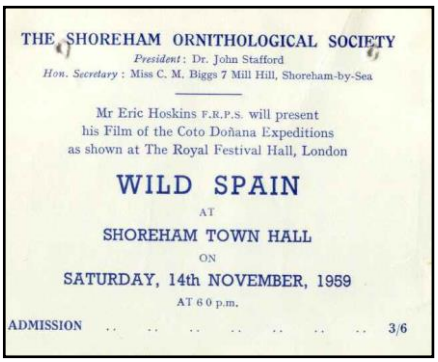
In 1956 I went on to a Teacher Training College where I had to decide on a subject for my thesis. I was told only one other person had chosen Birds as a special interest and that had been some while ago so there was concern about who could be found to mark the paper. Perhaps I was foolish to persist but I was unlikely to have another opportunity to use my hobby to my advantage. Stubbornly I set out on a rather lonely trail which I thoroughly enjoyed and from which I learned a great deal.

Looking back I am amazed at my ignorance. In 1958 I had no idea that the Little Ringed Plovers nesting on the gravel pits on my grandfather's farm were unusual. I did not know whether it was a common occurrence to see Gulls imprisoned by their feet into the frozen ground on the ploughed field. I wrote to James Fisher to ask if their webbed feet were harmed by such difficult conditions, I don't think he was able to answer the question very satisfactorily! I know I had not learned whether a particular bird was expected to be in England when I was seeing it, migration dates only became important at a much later stage.

The imposing and famous Barn Owl picture – *Eric Hosking*

You must remember that identification guides were not as readily available as they are now and general information on birds was usually derived from one's own observations and from others more knowledgeable than oneself.

In 1958 I was fortunate to attend the lectures of Tom Bartlett, an excellent teacher and with an unrivalled knowledge of birds. He taught me the meaning of the word 'JIZZ' of a bird and he led outings which I shall never forget. It was probably through him that I went to the Royal Festival Hall to see 'Wild Spain'. This was a record of the expedition to the Coto Donana by Eric Hosking and many other birders who have since become household



THE SHOREHAM ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

President: Dr. John Stafford

Hon. Secretary: Miss C. M. Biggs 7 Mill Hill, Shoreham-by-Sea

Mr Eric Hoskins F.R.P.S. will present
his Film of the Coto Doñana Expeditions
as shown at The Royal Festival Hall, London

WILD SPAIN

AT

SHOREHAM TOWN HALL

ON

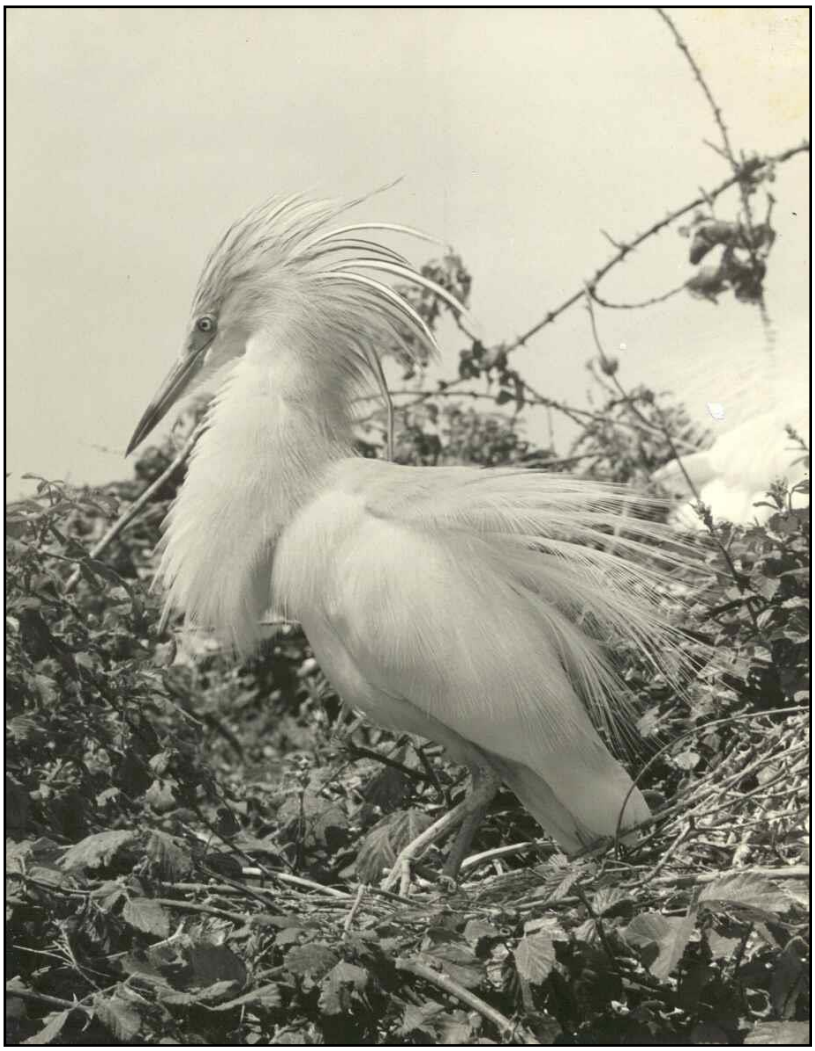
SATURDAY, 14th NOVEMBER, 1959

AT 6 0 p.m.

ADMISSION 3/6

names. This type of Natural History film was not common in the late 1950's and I was deeply impressed by the superb photography. Soon after this I went to an exhibition of Eric Hosking's photographs in London, almost all black and white as I remember, extraordinary pictures of intense clarity.

As I wandered round I came face to face with Eric Hosking and congratulated him on the exhibition. Then, and to this day I do not know how I dared to be so forward, I asked if he had any pictures he could let me have for my thesis and for teaching purposes. He seemed interested as I explained that I found young children very receptive to my lessons on birds and in particular the way in which their flight differs.



Squacco Heron – *Eric Hosking*

You can imagine my delight and astonishment when I received a generous number of photographs taken by the foremost bird photographer in Britain at that time. They have been used on numerous occasions in my teaching career and I owe a debt of gratitude to Eric Hosking for his kindness in listening to me and his unwarranted generosity to a student he had never met before.

I left College in 1959, the same year, I have found from our archives that Eric Hosking brought his film of "Wild Spain" to Shoreham Town Hall to show to members of the Shoreham Ornithological Society. Why? The President of the ShOS was John Stafford, who had met Eric Hosking when he went to Havergate to film Avocets, and later joined some of his expeditions in his dual capacity as a doctor/birdwatcher.

I first met John Stafford in 1966 and during a conversation I discovered our common link with Eric Hosking. John had many signed photographs given to him over the years by Eric. I was introduced to the Shoreham Ornithological Society and for the first time in my life I really began to learn about birds. I remember bitter weather at Pagham, flood-water coming over the top of my Wellington boots one freezing day on Amberley Wildbrooks, walks along the River Adur trying to distinguish the Curlew Sandpipers in a mass of waders, idyllic days wandering through woodlands learning birdsong (which has stood me in good stead as my eyes have failed me in recent years) and just revelling in the changing seasons and what they might bring in the way of birds.
Now fifty years after that O'Level exam I am glad I decided to step out of line and follow my instinct to improve my knowledge not only of birds but all Natural History. On the whole it has cost very little and has been immensely rewarding.
In the same way the formation of the Shoreham Ornithological Society in 1953 was a step out of line which has promoted awareness of birds to many hundreds of people over these fifty years. Long may it continue!

Some of the rarer birds of the area *Dave Smith*

Kentish Plover, Goring and Shoreham, 24th October 1981 to 15th March 1982
Having received information that a Kentish Plover had been found on the high-tide wader roost at Goring Gap, I managed to get there on 29th October to scan the roost which held, amongst other species, 50 to 60 Ringed Plovers. Looking carefully through them, the bird was soon found; initially as its upperparts were a pale sand-brown, distinctly lighter than that of the Ringed Plovers. Further scrutiny confirmed that I was looking at the right bird. Subsequently it could be found on the wader roost, on the beach at Goring, or at Shoreham during its stay, and was last seen on 15th March 1982. A very rare record of wintering by this species in the county.

I have been counting this roost during the years since and sadly, this most unusual occurrence has never been repeated.

14th May 1984 – a 'Pom' evening

Acting on information that substantial numbers of Pomarine Skuas were moving eastwards off Sussex on the afternoon of 14th, I arrived at the Marine Gardens shelter on Worthing

seafront at 18.00, to join John Newnham, Mike Hall, and other regulars there at the time. It was a bright, warm evening with a light NE wind and a misty horizon.

Pomarine Skuas – *John Reaney*

The next two-and-a-half hours were unforgettable. There was virtually no time to put up the scope when the first group, of nine, appeared at 18.05, closely followed by five at 18.06, one at 18.08, and one at 18.27.

Then nearly an hour's break. We thought passage had finished for the day when, at 19.20, a loose pack of 26 drifted out of the mist, in no formation, some high, some low, and all moving slowly east. What a sight! – and still the largest flock of 'Poms' I've seen from the Sussex coast.

Finally six flew east at 19.56, almost overhead, giving superb views of their long 'spoons'. Remarkably passage of other species, including 'Commic' Terns, Whimbrel, Knot, and Bar-tailed Godwit was faithfully noted despite the excitement of the skuas.

Mike Hall has special commemorative 'Pom mugs' thrown on such auspicious occasions, and I am pleased to say that mine is still intact!

Whiskered Tern, Worthing Beach 25th May 1985

May 25th 1985 was a warm, sunny day with a light southeasterly wind, and I spent most of the day from 7.30 seawatching from the 'Marine Gardens' beach shelter, at Worthing Beach. The morning was largely uneventful, but passage of Common Terns picked up in the afternoon. I decided to call it a day at 17.30, and by a complete fluke, had to drive east instead of the usual Goring, to the west. I noticed John Newnham watching from his beach hut and decided to stop for a chat. Passage was light but steady, and on a glorious evening I decided to stay on for a while. How glad I am in retrospect that I did!
At 1930 John picked up a tern to our east, moving west, with three Common Terns; I got onto it and identification was not difficult for either of us; an adult Whiskered Tern in

summer plumage with black cap and brilliant white cheek patch, the latter contrasting strongly with sooty to black underparts. Luckily the bird was close and we had time to note other critical identification features.
Whilst the bird was still in view, Brian Clay joined us (sorry Brian, I've got to relate this one!) There had been a long history of we seawatchers at Worthing joking that, on another watcher's arrival, a rarity had just passed, so when we (very excitedly) said 'Whiskered Tern flying east', Brian thought we were 'playing around' again and lost valuable seconds – by the time we'd convinced him, the bird was distant, and passing Worthing Pier.
Sussex has done well for this much sought-after rare vagrant and at the time, once accepted by BBRC it constituted the sixth county record and the first for the SDOS recording area.

Marsh Warbler, 30th June 1985, Sandgate Park

Chris Fox, Brian Clay and myself visited the site that day, primarily to count the Sand Martin colony.

On arrival a Little Ringed Plover called and shortly afterwards two birds were seen together, most likely a breeding pair. We moved away from them to a small marshy area consisting of goat willow and *phragmites* reeds, situated underneath the Sand Martin colony on the sand cliff-face.

An unusual song was picked up – at first, Nightingale, then Song Thrush, then Sedge Warbler, and in between a number of quite melodic, fluting notes. Marsh Warbler was strongly suspected. The bird remained skulking and it was some time before we could obtain brief views, of an obvious 'Reed Warbler-type' *acrocephalus*. Other species mimicked in the next two hours were Tree Sparrow, Starling, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Cetti's Warbler, and not surprisingly, Little Ringed Plover and Sand Martin. We reported the sighting to Tony Prater, the then County Recorder, who visited the site during that evening and confirmed identification. As breeding may have been involved, he decided that news of the bird should not be released.

Lapland Bunting, 19th November 1985, Goring Beach Green

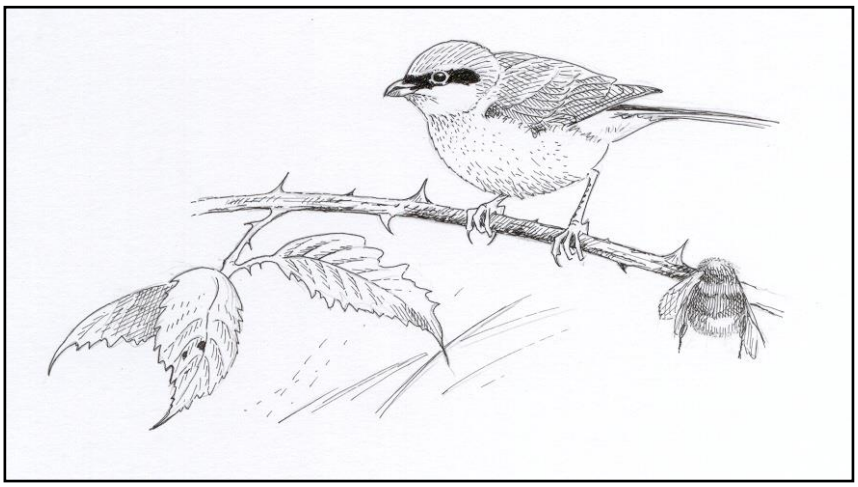
Unusually cold weather conditions for the date persuaded me to take a short lunchtime look offshore. A light northeasterly wind was blowing, with frequent snow flurries. Perhaps there would be some hard weather movement? I never did get to find out.

Walking from the end of Alinora Avenue along the path to the seafront, a Goldfinch flew across, calling, then a loud, penetrating 'tchew' followed by a larger passerine. I recognised the call as Lapland Bunting, having heard them recently on the Scillies. The bird landed with the Goldfinch only 20 feet away to give prolonged close views, as it fed along the edge of the path. A bright individual, and probably a first-winter male. I telephoned Frank Forbes, who relayed the news to other local birders. Remarkably, Roy Sandison visited the site shortly afterwards and found a second Lapland Bunting with the first.

19th September 1987 – a good SDOS field outing

This was a day to be remembered by the 14 members who braved the early morning rain. I took the party directly to Sidlesham Ferry where a Wilson's Phalarope had been reported on the previous day. Fortunately it was still there, feeding only feet away under the railings and giving superb views to the members present. Other waders on the Ferry included 3 Curlew Sandpipers, 1 Little Stint, 10 Ruffs, 1 Common Sandpiper, Dunlins and Black-tailed Godwits. A Marsh Harrier flew across the back of the Ferry fields, mobbed by crows and the fields themselves held 80 – 100 Yellow Wagtails and 14 Golden Plovers. Moving towards Pagham west side a Spotted Redshank was flushed from the Ferry lagoon. Good numbers of common migrants were seen between here and Church Norton, including Redstart, Whinchat, Wheatear, Lesser Whitethroat, and Spotted Flycatcher. A Glaucous Gull delighted many by its all too brief appearance in the harbour, where waders included Greenshank and Knot. To complete the day, a number of members joined me at Snowhill Marsh, East Head, where a Little Egret was well seen; and in those days of course, was still a national rarity.

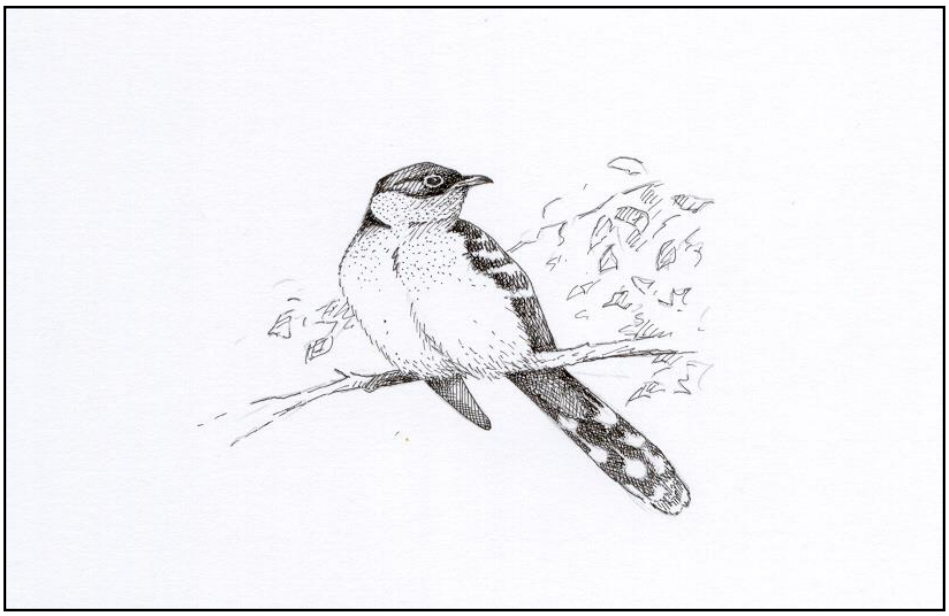
We repeated the outing on 17th September 1988 and this time were rewarded with another nearctic wader, American Golden Plover, plus Red-backed Shrike.



Red Backed Shrike – *John Reaney*

Like buses, sometimes they come in pairs…..Great Spotted Cuckoo, 27th March 1990, Dawlish Warren and 5th April 1990, Shoreham Airport

Bernie Forbes, Richard Ives and myself drove down to Devon on 27th March for a Great Spotted Cuckoo, which had been frequenting Dawlish Warren for around 1 week. Fears that it may not have survived an overnight frost evaporated quickly as it was showing on our arrival, in an area of short turf and thin scrub, and feeding on brown, furry caterpillars. We watched it for over an hour, before heading back eastwards, and stopping at Portland Bill where a Woodchat Shrike gave excellent views near the Observatory, and at Radipole Lake, an adult Iceland Gull showed down to a few feet outside the RSPB centre.



Great Spotted Cuckoo – *John Reaney*

I must confess to being amazed when John Newnham phoned me on the evening of 4th April to say that a Great Spotted Cuckoo had been reported that day near Shoreham Airport – found by a lorry driver waiting at the traffic lights just west of the R Adur flyover! Richard Ives and myself were there early on the next morning and after a short while, Richard relocated it in the grounds of Ricardo Consulting Engineers, perched in a hawthorn bush. After almost an hour it flew to the bramble-covered embankment bordering the A27 and began to feed voraciously on what was probably brown-tailed moth caterpillars.
I had to go to work, so phoned it in to Birdline from there (mobile phones being equivalent in size to telephone kiosks in those days!) I visited it several times during its stay, until 1st May, when possibly its caterpillar food supply ran out (Fairbank 1991B). It was seen and appreciated by many. The first 'live' record for Sussex, the only other being one picked up dead near Bognor Regis on 4th August 1967.
Two in a week and I've still not seen another in Britain!

Serin, 19th March 1994, Goring Gap

On a day of limited passerine migration with just small incoming flocks of Meadow Pipits, I decided to check out the trees and scrub around the electricity sub-station, on the west side of Goring Gap. Walking the path towards it, 100 or more of the then-regular wintering Linnet flock were still present, many of them singing from hawthorns. Through the Linnet cacophony I could hear an unusual song, distorted, but the first impressions were of a melodic Wren, and passing the Linnets realised that the song was that of Serin. It was singing from the grounds of the sub-station, in a *macrocarpa* some 30 feet above ground level, but frustratingly could not be seen. Brief views were had of the bird when it moved to another *macrocarpa* to disappear, then sing again. After listening to it for 5 minutes, it

flew eastwards with a small flock of Goldfinches. I phoned the news into Birdline, expecting though that the bird had departed, and several visits through the day drew a blank.
However, on 20th March and on returning home from Ambersham Common, I found a note from Richard Ives to say that he'd had two singing Serins at Goring Gap! One, a probable first-summer male was still present in the afternoon, and showed well. This bird stayed in the area for several days, often singing from the sub-station scrub, and attracted unusually high numbers of birders for a 'sub-rarity'.

Radde's Warbler, West Worthing, 27th October 1994

At 14.00 on 27/10/1994, Richard Fairbank telephoned me to say that he had just seen a Radde's Warbler in a Reigate Road garden, less than a kilometre from where I live. Not surprisingly I was there in a few minutes, and welcomed in by the occupant (and original identifier of the bird), Father Keith Wood. The rear garden looked ideal for this skulking species, i.e. plenty of thick cover. Three other observers arrived and we waited for its reappearance.

With light fading at 16.30 the bird flew into a buddleia, then worked its way through a thick hedgerow, at times showing very well, and one of the smartest Radde's I've seen. It then disappeared into the centre of the hedgerow and appeared to go to roost.

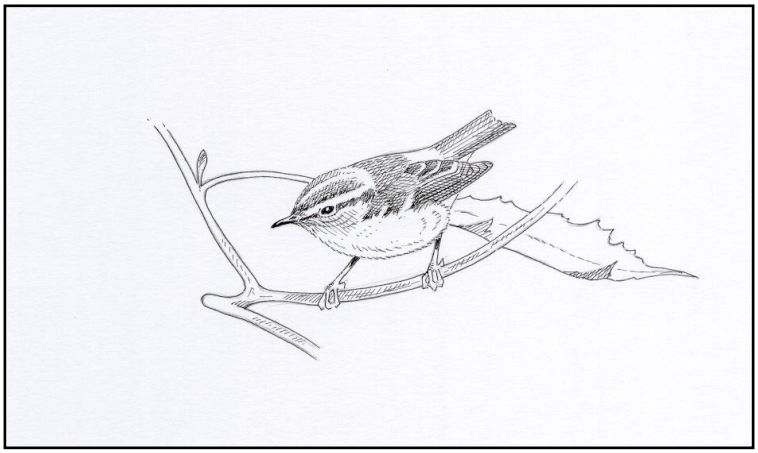
Sadly news of this amazing urban sighting could not be released, as the bird could only be viewed from the rear garden and the occupant was going away for a period on the next morning. Full marks to the finder for identifying this difficult species! The few birders who connected with it prepared descriptions and it was accepted by BBRC. At the time, it was the fourth record for Sussex, only the second for West Sussex, and the first for the SDOS recording area (and one of its most unusual records).

Yellow-browed Warbler, Goring Gap, 5th October 1996

The usual round of my local patch takes me first to the seaward end of the Plantation at Goring Gap, and on the day 10 or more Chiffchaffs were present there. On reaching a stunted sycamore bordering the beach path, I heard the call of Yellow-browed Warbler, a loud 'tsweep', repeated several times. The bird was exceptionally active and difficult to get a decent view of through binoculars, and at times 'tumbled' from the top of the tree to near the base. I caught it in flight as it moved to another sycamore, then managed binocular views as it perched at the apex of this tree. It then flew to a Holm Oak and frustratingly, stopped calling. An hour's search could not relocate it, and I assumed that it had moved on.
Each October I make an effort within the local patch to find this species or Pallas's Warbler, and after many years, at least one of them turned up. Perhaps, with the latter occurring more frequently in the county over the past few years, Pallas's will be next!
Just out of interest, Gary Edwards and myself found another Yellow-browed Warbler at Birling Gap, Beachy Head on the very next day.

Pallas's Warbler, Brooklands 25th October 1999

A small fall of Pallas's Warblers occurred on the east Kent coast on 24th October, so Bernie Forbes and myself decided to check Brooklands on 25th as it seemed as good a site as any for a potential individual of this species. At 09.25, we arrived at a large sycamore between the sewage works and golf course, where forty or more Goldcrests were present. Bernie walked on to check further down the path, and I decided to stay for a while and look through all the Goldcrests. After a few minutes, a broad yellow supercilium appeared at the top of the sycamore, then frustratingly disappeared. On this brief view I was confident so shouted "Pallas's" to Bernie, who was with me in seconds. Frustratingly, the bird did not re-appear for probably only 15 seconds or so (but what felt like minutes!) until it came into full view lower down the tree.



Pallas's Warbler – *John Reaney*

Both of us were straight onto it, and could confirm its identification immediately. We phoned the news through to Birdline and local birders began to arrive quickly. The bird would disappear with Goldcrests on a feeding circuit for anything between 20 minutes and 1 hour, but always returned to the same area to show each time for 10 minutes or more, often at very close range, and always typically hyperactive. This pattern was repeated throughout the day, enabling many birders to see it, but it was not present on 26th. 2 Firecrests. 10 Chiffchaffs, and 6 Blackcaps were also in the area.
I returned to Goring Gap later in the day in the hope that my long awaited 'local patch Pallas's' might just be present, but no – I'm still waiting for one there.

Cattle Egret, Worthing Beach, 7th May 2000

I arrived at 07.10 on the day, to join John Newnham, Mike Hall and the rest of the Worthing sea-watch team. I hardly had time to put up my scope when John picked up an Egret, high above the tide line and in the middle of a pack of 100 or more Black-headed Gulls. We fully expected it to be a Little Egret – still not a common sight on seawatches but the most likely species – until we noticed its short, thick, yellow bill!

It flew slowly past, and was seen later at Brighton Marina and in the Cuckmere Valley. Coincidentally 2 Little Egrets flew past Worthing Beach one hour after the Cattle Egret.

Best birding moments *Dave Smith*

East Anglia, 8th December 1985. A good day's birding.

News of a White-tailed Eagle in Suffolk and Black-and-white Warbler in Norfolk prompted a carload of us to an early morning start on the 8th December. We stopped first at Westleton in Suffolk, where there had been a long-staying Nutcracker but there was no sign of it, and indeed, as I later heard that it had been picked up dead, it may have expired by then. Continuing northwards, a ringtail Hen Harrier hunted over a field on the approach to Covehithe.

On arrival at Benacre Broad, the immature White-tailed Eagle was showing, perched on a conifer around two kilometres away, but large enough to still give reasonable telescope views at 40X magnification. It then moved to a closer dead tree and made several low passes over the pool, sending all the wildfowl present into utter panic. After some twenty-five minutes, it flew out of sight into nearby woodland.
An unforgettable sighting of a truly magnificent bird.

Returning to the car, we continued onwards, our destination being the How Hill Field Centre near Ludham in Norfolk. A short walk across a playing field brought us to the field centre. Remarkably, few birders were present but we soon located the Black-and–white Warbler which gave fleeting views amongst well-spaced silver birches, in the Centre garden. It moved off, but was soon relocated, on the edge of a silver birch spinney, and was viewed at times down to 10 to 15 feet. Strongly resembling a black and white Treecreeper, it spiralled up tree trunks and at one stage dangled from a thin branch over our heads. It made a number of brief aerial forays to catch insects, and was twice seen to extract small larvae from crevices in tree bark. A stunning bird, and easily in my top ten of most satisfying sightings in Britain.

Finally, we visited the Buckenham reserve for views of circa 120 Taiga Bean Geese, and a Short-eared Owl. Not a bad day's birding!

5th April 1986 – another great day out

A white-morph Gyr Falcon was reported from a number of sites on Dartmoor in late March 1986, and was finally 'pinned down' at Berry Head, Brixham, where it roosted nightly. However, the information was that it left its roost shortly after dawn each day, necessitating an overnight drive.

400 or more birders were present in the Berry Head car park at 04.00, including several coaches hired for the occasion. At 05.15 the warden led us, stumbling in the dark, to a nearby fort overlooking a quarry, and we arranged ourselves along the battlements to await first light.

As the light increased, a white 'lump' could be made out on a cliff edge, only 100 metres distant. The light improved, and the 'lump' assumed shape, unmistakably that of a Gyr Falcon. The bird remained until the sun was well up, giving superb views, but being constantly mobbed by a pair of Carrion Crows – but from a distance! At 07.15 it flew from its roost, disappearing rapidly around the Head, and was not seen again. My notes state "What a bird! A huge, thickset falcon, pure white underparts and head, with a dark stripe through the eye extending to the nape. Scapulars and upperwing coverts were white with contrasting rows of small black 'chevrons' and black tips to the exposed primaries. Tail white, with several thin, indistinct dark bars".

Well satisfied, we breakfasted at a local café then began the trip home, breaking the journey to take in a Long-billed Dowitcher on the River Hamble in Hampshire, and a Great Grey Shrike in the New Forest.

Black-throated Thrush, St Mary's, 23rd October 1987 and Two-barred Greenish Warbler, 24th October 1987, Gugh

It had been a fairly quiet day by Scillies standards, with Short-toed Lark, Little Bunting, and Richard's Pipit before we decided mid-afternoon to return to our hired cottage. News came of an unusual warbler on Gugh that the St Agnes regulars were unsure of, but at 17.00, no boats were prepared to go out. A lesson was learnt here – the identification skills of the St Agnes regulars is legendary, and if they have a bird of which they are unsure, it is very likely to be rare and unusual indeed; but more of that, later.

Most of our number retired to bed for a well-earned rest. I decided to stay in the kitchen and was boiling a kettle for tea, when a rapid 'rapping' came to the kitchen window, facing the main street. A birder called "Black-throated Thrush", then was gone. Shouting upstairs produced instant pandemonium; one of our number, in the process of washing a shirt, just put it on wet and catapulted himself out of the cottage.

However, where was this thrush? Birders were milling around in hundreds in the Hugh Town main streets, trying to obtain information on its whereabouts. Our party was split asunder, some going one way, some another – then confirmation of the site, Holy Vale just below Silver Lane – and a long walk so late in the day. Fortunately, for a small fee I persuaded a local with a mini-moke to take the nearest four birders plus myself to the site. We were dropped off at Kitty Down, and a small group of birders could be seen some distance away; walking onto Silver Lane and taking a short footpath. I asked the nearest birder "Is it showing?" "Look in my scope", he said; the bird was only 50 metres distant, feeding in a stubble field with Redwings and Fieldfares. After a few minutes birders poured in from all directions and the bird, most unobligingly flew off with the other thrushes into distant conifers, and out of sight. Light was fading badly by now, and the looks of desperation on twitchers' faces was most noticeable. Another 10 minutes, all seemed lost, when someone found it in the next field, and at least everyone had a chance to see it, albeit in poor light for a minute or two before it flew off to roost.

The following day, 24th October was our final day on the Scillies and we were due to take the 13.00 helicopter back to Penzance. Most of our party decided to spend the morning on

St Mary's. Eric Soden and myself, though, decided to take the boat over to St Agnes and walk across to Gugh, as we were intrigued by what the 'mystery warbler' there might turn out to be. Few other birders shared similar thoughts, and only a single half-filled boat departed. Rumours circulating now were that the bird was a Yellow-browed Warbler or possibly a Hume's Warbler, the latter then considered to be a race of Yellow-browed, but has since been split.

Luckily the tide was low so we could walk across from St Agnes to Gugh. On arrival, the bird was found in a pittisporum hedge. Our initial reactions were that it resembled a darker-backed, greener Chiffchaff – but with two wing bars! Our small party watched it, at times down to a few feet for over an hour. We huddled into a group to discuss the bird. The renowned birder Bryan Bland was there, and he, having seen numerous Two-barred Greenish Warblers abroad, was of the opinion that this could well be one, although he'd like to see it in the hand before making a decision. A message was relayed to St Mary's via CB radio – a request for any ringer on the island with mist nets to come over to Gugh.

At this stage time was pressing and we had to leave. Whilst waiting for the boat, a 'flotilla' approached St Agnes, many boats packed tight with birders! The CB radio message had undoubtedly had its effect – if mist nets are requested then surely the bird is likely to be an extreme rarity. We departed, still without confirmation but on our return journey one of our number phoned Birdline from Cornwall. The bird had been confirmed as a Two-Barred Greenish Warbler, the first for Britain. There was much weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth from those in our party who spent the morning on St Mary's. Considered by some to be a sub-species of Greenish Warbler, and by others to be a 'full' species, there has since been only a single further British record, in Norfolk.

Golden-winged Warbler, February 1989 Larkfield, Maidstone

The news from Birdline on 8th February was scarcely believable – a Golden-winged Warbler frequenting Tesco's car park and its surrounding housing estate near New Hythe, Maidstone. Not the commonest New World warbler on its native soil, this is one of the most unlikely and remarkable vagrants to arrive in Britain and was the first record for the Western Palearctic.

I managed to scrounge an afternoon off work on 9th but on arrival at around 15.00, learnt that it had only been seen for a short while in the morning. Frustratingly, it could not be relocated on the day. Compensation though, there was in the form of a very confiding Waxwing in Tesco's car park and a Great Grey Shrike in scrub, just across the main road.

My next opportunity was not until 11th February, a Saturday, and this time the hordes descended – an estimated 2500 to 3000 people present on the day. It had not been found after two hours; then news broke via CB radio of its relocation in the housing estate. The poor residents must have thought it was a military invasion – hundreds pouring down normally quiet suburban roads towards their destination, and good but brief views were had of the bird in a cul-de-sac garden. Several locals were most helpful, hanging out of bedroom windows and directing us onto the bird. Others were more enterprising; at least

two householders dusted off their barbecues and sold beefburgers and hot dogs from their gardens, doing the proverbial 'roaring trade'.

The bird, despite receiving so much attention, vanished again and by now our party had lost one another in the crowds. I wandered some distance from the masses, and was passing a small car park when movement caught my eye in a nearby garden. I caught a glimpse of a bird in the centre of a thin *pyrocantha* bush; it was moving upwards so I decided to stay and discover its identity.

It then came into full view at the top of the bush, 20 feet away – the Golden-winged Warbler! Resplendent in early morning sunshine, its golden yellow forecrown shone like a beacon and outstanding too were its wide yellow wing bars and black throat and eye patches. A few other birders came over to see what I was looking at; then the majority noticed and poured in behind me. Time to leave!

Remarkably, at around the same time and not too far away at another Kent site, a Yellowthroat was present. This bird was suppressed as its location could not have stood the pressure from so many birders – surely everyone at the Golden-winged Warbler would have also visited the Yellowthroat. Sad (I've still not seen a Yellowthroat) but a situation where the environment comes first.

Sardinian Warbler, 16th October 1990, Cot Valley, West Cornwall

Bernie Forbes and myself spent 13th to 20th October 1990 in West Cornwall with Owen Mitchell joining us three days into the trip. We hired a cottage in the village of Tregeseal, St Just and just a short walk from the famous Kenidjack valley. This valley had held the first Yellow-throated Vireo for Britain some two weeks earlier. On 14th, sadly we could only look at the vireo-less bushes it had frequented, now occupied by a Firecrest. Unusual species were still to be seen, the highlights being Ring-Billed Gull at Copperhouse Creek on 14th, and Black Kite and Rustic Bunting at Lower Drift and Land's End respectively on 15th.

The 16th started bright and sunny, so in the morning we decided on a walk down the east side of Cot Valley. More migrants were present than on the previous two days, noticeably Chiffchaffs and Goldcrests.

At 09.15, Bernie and myself had almost reached the sea end of the valley, with Owen around 150 metres behind us. We turned, to see Owen frantically waving to us; this must be something good! We sped back to Owen's position where he told us he'd just had a probable Sardinian Warbler in the trackside gorse and bracken scrub. This was, at the time a British 'tick' for me, and the next couple of minutes felt like hours, waiting for the bird to show again. Thankfully this it did, only 10 to 15 metres away, a splendid male perched on top of a low gorse bush and in full view, with the sun behind us. It became very active, moving up the valley in short bursts but seldom being lost from view. It moved to thicker blackthorns on a bend in the track, then flew across the valley to perch at the top of a bracken stem; then disappeared into cover.

Knowing that other birders were watching the top of the valley, I ran up to wave at a group situated high on the west side; all came running and I gave them 'Sardinian Warbler' and directions to it as they passed. One, who will remain nameless (but known to many long-term SDOS members), said "Is that all?" Strange.

Unfortunately though, despite Bernie and Owen staying where the bird was last seen, it never reappeared, possibly just moving away unseen through thick cover. I believe that it was not reliably seen again. One of those rare occasions where you happen to be in the right place at exactly the right time, and it illustrates that, even in well-watched areas, just how many rare passerines must creep through unseen.

Oriental Pratincole, 30th August 1993, Pevensey Levels

A colossal rarity for Sussex, an Oriental Pratincole, was found on Pevensey Levels just north of the A259 on 29th August, and an early start by Richard Ives and myself on 30th was paramount! This proved to be a wise decision.

On arrival, it was sitting, almost motionless in a grassy field, and poor views were had through binoculars. However, Tim Parmenter kindly let us look through his telescope and much better views were obtained at 40x magnification.

After only five minutes, all the birds in the area panicked and although no obvious candidate could be seen a raptor, perhaps a Peregrine may have been responsible. The Pratincole flew too, heading east, and giving great flight views, where its shorter tail (in comparison to Black-winged and Collared Pratincole), and lack of white trailing edge to the secondaries was apparent. We watched it in flight for some 15 minutes – at times it would turn back, then continue eastwards, and continued this process several times before it eventually flew south and was last seen as a distant dot following the coastline, again eastwards. A 'close call'!

18th September 1996 - A good day out for rarities!

Three SDOS members, including myself left Lancing at 05.45 hrs for the long haul to Corton, just above Lowestoft, the objective being Arctic Warbler. None of us had seen this species before and, apart from the occasional bird on the Scillies, most records are from far-flung northern sites. To date it has never been recorded in Sussex. One this far south had to be gone for!

We arrived at 09.30 and walked the short distance to a derelict holiday camp, overgrown with scrub and surrounded by a few oaks and hawthorns. The weather conditions were not advantageous, cool with a strong NE wind. Surprisingly few birders were present and the bird had not been seen so far that day. Two circuits of the area brought just single Lesser Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, and Blue Tit.

Around 10.30 the wind eased a little, and the temperature rose slightly. Bernie Forbes and myself were just rounding a group of disused chalets, when an Icterine Warbler kindly obliged by posing on top of a low hawthorn. We glimpsed it a few more times during the

morning, but only in flight between cover. Another circuit brought more interest in the form of two Redstarts and a Pied Flycatcher.

Around 11.30, the Icterine Warbler flew into a nearby apple tree, so we went over to look at it again, but it remained unseen. However, next to the apple was a stunted oak, in which a *phylloscopus* warbler briefly appeared, then just as quickly disappeared. One birder had quite a good view of it and thought it was the sought-after Arctic Warbler so, banking on the bird performing a feeding circuit, we waited by the stunted oak. Sure enough, after 20 minutes the bird re-appeared and this time stayed for three or four minutes, giving excellent views. The Arctic Warbler it indeed was; a noticeably large *phylloscopus*, and showing all the characteristics necessary for positive identification. These included a long, thick black bill, huge off-white supercilium flaring behind the eye, pointed white greater coverts wing bar plus a faint median coverts wing bar (indicating a probable bird of the year), and flesh-pink legs. During the period of observation, it was seen to take insects from the underside of oak leaves.

A sea watch provided little, so we returned via Abberton Reservoir (Essex) for good views of a male Blue-winged Teal, a Pectoral Sandpiper, 30 Curlew Sandpipers, 20 Little Stints, plus numerous Ruffs and Black-tailed Godwits. Yesterday's Long-tailed Skua there was not to be seen, and we never did find the 'resident' Buff-breasted Sandpiper but no-one was unduly upset! Arctic Warbler had been seen, at long last.

Northern Waterthrush, 17th October 1996 Portland Bill

This was one that Richard Ives and myself could not resist travelling for! A Hawfinch flying over the road near Ringwood was a good omen on the way down, but on arrival at 09.20 we learnt that the bird, which frequented the Observatory garden, had not been seen since 07.40.

After an hour or so and still no sign, we walked towards the quarry where a Subalpine Warbler had been reported – then a shout of "Got it" came from the direction of the 'Coastguard' cottages. Following the direction of the voice, we found a number of birders looking into a garden – the Waterthrush then sat up briefly on a hedge, and disappeared into the garden again. We watched it for long periods, down to just a few feet as it worked along a line of runner beans and dug insects and worms from a compost heap. We returned to it several times during the day, when it was still very active, picking insects from concrete paths, and feeding on the lawn of an adjacent garden. It called several times, invaluable as it enabled me to pick up a Northern Waterthrush on call two weeks later in Barbados!

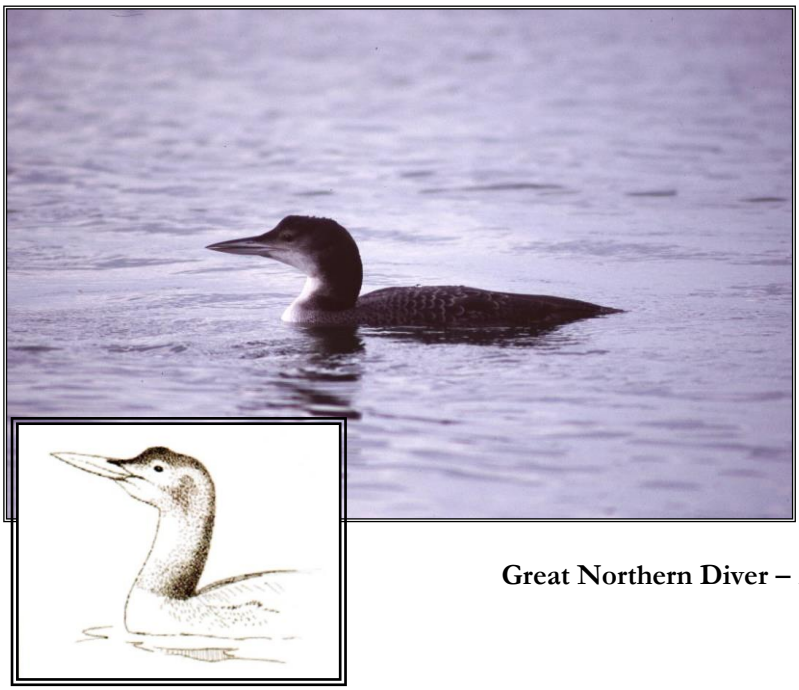
It was not seen on the 18th, and we heard that it had been taken by a Sparrowhawk at 17.30 on 17th. If so, a sad end to a delightful bird.

The Subalpine Warbler showed well too, in the quarry, as did a Lapland Bunting on the hillside opposite the Observatory. To round off a superb day, a Red-breasted Flycatcher showed for long periods in nearby sycamores.

White-billed Diver, Selsey Bill 28th November 1999 and Church Norton, 7th and 8th December 1999

On 28/11/99 Richard Ives and myself arrived at Selsey Bill around 09.30, and were unusually the only birders there. At 09.50 a large diver approached from the west, close in, and on size and huge trailing 'paddles', we expected it to be a Great Northern. However, we rapidly changed our minds when we saw the uptilted, pale yellow bill! Not in view for long, but we noted the salient features and although sure of its identity, phoned it in to Birdline SE as a 'probable' White-billed. A Great Northern Diver was reported at the mouth of Pagham harbour that afternoon, so we did not expect to be widely believed.

On 7th December, Bernie Forbes and myself were at nearby Church Norton. In the afternoon we walked to the seafront; two birders were coming away and told us of a Great Northern Diver and a Red-necked Grebe on the sea, so off we went to relocate the two. The grebe was soon found and after reasonable views, we found the diver around 250 metres offshore, but in a rough sea, the wind being force 6 to 7, and from the west. Inadequate views were obtained before we lost it; but we both considered that it had a huge, cream-white bill in poor light, with no obvious dark culmen ridge. Additionally it held its head in a distinctly uplifted angle, not to the horizontal, which we would have expected of Great Northern.



Great Northern Diver – *Keith Noble*

Inset – White-billed Diver – *John Reaney*

Bernie phoned me that evening and we were not satisfied that the bird was a Great Northern, so we returned to Church Norton on the next morning, arriving at 08.45. At 09.00 a very large diver was picked up on its approach and passed at some 250 metres range. In much better light we could see the extensive white in the neck, 'bulging' below

and behind the ear coverts and around the eye, and the darker areas of the neck merging gradually with the white, i.e. no distinct separation between the two colours. The head and neck mid grey tones were the same as that on the mantle and back, with no contrast. Also apparent was a pale brown/grey band on the upper breast, appearing as a 'half collar'. Neck very thick. Huge 'paddles' trailed behind, in flight head and neck held just below the horizontal.

It pitched down on the sea and we could confirm other salient features, e.g. the huge, pale yellowish or creamy upswept bill, and the white on the sides of the neck could still be seen when it faced away from us. Overall, it resembled an enormous Red-throated Diver.

We phoned the sighting into Birdline and a number of local observers saw it on the day. It became increasingly difficult to see as it drifted out in a heavy sea. A few Sussex birders managed to locate it at some distance the next day, again in a heavy swell. It was not seen again and may have departed with an influx of Great Northern Divers on 9th.

Both the Selsey and Church Norton sightings were undoubtedly of the same individual, and were accepted by BBRC. It constituted the first record for West Sussex and only the third record of this species for the county as a whole, the first being off Newhaven in April 1997 and the second off Ovingdean in June 1999. There have been no further records at the time of writing (February 2002).

A postscript is that, some months later, a White-billed Diver was claimed on the sea off Selsey Bill. Bernie Forbes and Richard Ives were close-by when they received the news via Birdline SE. They arrived there quickly and re-identified it as a Great Northern Diver, and quickly phoned in the correct identification to prevent birders from a wasted journey. However, some did arrive, and, again citing 'birder scepticism', one nameless individual was heard to say "Well, that puts the earlier sightings into context. I'll eat my hat if BBRC accept that one".

I do hope that the unfortunate hat was both edible and digestible….

Inspirational for a young bird watcher *Mike Helps*

Little Stint – *Keith Noble*

Songs and calls of birds often evoke memories of my first encounter with a species. It was a Great Tit singing at Moulscombe Wild Park that sparked my first interest in birds in the mid 1950s.

In those childhood years my mother regularly took my sister and I by steam train from Brighton to the weekly market at Steyning. From the train window I noticed small birds by the edge of the Adur. An exploratory trip to Shoreham resulted in the identification of Ringed Plover. The mud flats there looked much like the seashore but alas near the Shoreham footbridge I had to abandon my plastic opera glasses and rubber boots in order to struggle out of the mud. Fortunately a friendly house-boater gave me plimsoles for the journey home.

The Shoreham Ornithological Society was inspirational for a young bird watcher. In those days it was Miss Biggs who organized the evening meetings and field trips. There were for me many memorable birds at Shoreham, like the 2 Bluethroats and Little Stints on the Rubbish Dump Pool, September 1959, and the 6 Grey Phalaropes at Widewater on 9th October 1960. Messers Twort, Severs and Tom Palmer were the regular watchers, three elderly gentlemen happy to encourage new recruits. Meeting Tony Marr there led on to formative years at Selsey Bill. Memorable birds at Selsey included the Corncrake, on 29th April 1963, that flew in from the sea at 11.00 a.m. and flopped onto the sea wall just in front of Alan Kitson and myself, and the flock of 57 Cranes that flew south-west out over the sea until out of sight on 3rd November 1963. The Selsey Hut was the centre of a weekend way of life; it was where Ian Willis claimed that this egg wouldn't cook and grand plans were made for expeditions abroad.

At Sidlesham Ferry in 1963/4, Mike Helps, Richard Porter, Eddie Wiseman and Jim Williams – *Richard Porter*

Cirl Bunting was a breeding bird at Selsey, Beachy Head and inland at Lewes. I was also fortunate to encounter Stone Curlew at several sites in East Sussex, particularly around Firle Beacon. These have both now gone but Peregrines have returned and we now have Little Egrets, Pom Skuas and plenty of Collared Doves.

The changes of fortunes of a species are obviously more evident over the longer period. During my time many of the summer migrants such as Yellow Wagtails and Spotted Flycatchers seem to have decreased while certainly gulls and crows along with most of the raptor species have increased. Recollections can exaggerate the better aspects. I often find my own notes lacking from my earlier years, particularly for breeding birds. I have recently looked for good numerical records of breeding Willow Warblers to compare with now but have found precious few.

It would be arrogant to believe that all the changes have resulted from Man's activities alone. Whatever the reasons there are thankfully always birds to be enjoyed and hopefully the unexpected will come my way.

The way I found the Society was when my mother took me to the Reference Library at Brighton who gave us the contact. I enjoyed many meetings at the Huntingdon Hall. Field trips were usually by train. Members could get on the train at Brighton, Shoreham, and Goring etc. We would be off to Chichester and Thorney etc. Happy Days! There certainly were a lot of young members at that time. I suppose this was simply a matter of demography but I like to think we discovered birds in our own way.

My first optical equipment *Reg Bradbury*

I was introduced to birdwatching in 1963, my birding friend gave me my first optical equipment to get me started. It was a periscope from a World War Two Tank, magnification was brilliant, everything else was terrible – awkward to carry, hopeless to focus unless the bird remained motionless for a minute or two. I must have looked very strange carting this large piece of equipment about but I don't remember any odd comments. Fortunately, the Royal Navy sent me to Japan where I purchased a pair of 7 x 50 Omega binoculars. Now I use Opticron 8 x 42 roof prisms. However, as I do a lot of sea-watching and like to focus down for close-up views of insects and flowers, I am considering the Swarovski 10 x 42. All optical equipment has made so much progress since that first periscope!

My first bird identification book was " British Birds in Their Haunts" by the Rev. C. A. Johns, originally published in 1861 and revised by W.B. Alexander in 1948. The descriptions make interesting reading and local names are given with their derivations. The coloured plates by William Foster are rather formal, in many cases only the male is illustrated and the stance of the bird is not what we expect nowadays, but I still have the book for the interest value.

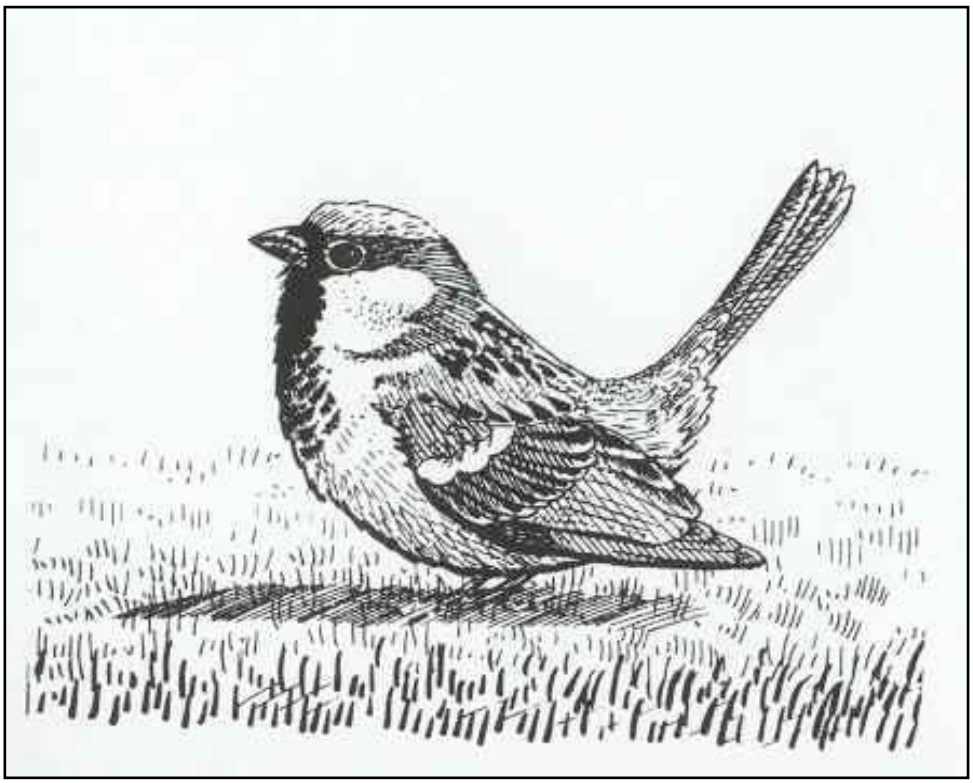
We were keen to become sea watchers *Mike Hall*

On the evening of Monday 12th May 1980 I was sitting on Worthing beach with several pupils from Steyning Grammar School. We were keen to become sea watchers but at that time we had no experience, very little skill and pretty inadequate equipment. There were birds everywhere going east and west. Confusing, tantalising birds which we all found impossible to identify. As we left, still with a southeasterly breeze in our faces, I felt that we had missed out on something! The next day someone told me that experienced sea

watchers gathered at the beach shelter just west of Grand Avenue. I ventured in and thanks to the kindness and skill of John Newnham and the others I was introduced to sea watching and to the Shoreham Ornithological Society. Having moved to Sussex only four years before and having been busy with work and the demands of a young family the Society gave me a new circle of friends. It also vastly improved my birding skills: The trips and meetings were of great value to me and I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the expert birders, John, Bernie, Dave, Richard, Colin, Brian, Phil, Frank, Roy and the others who were so generous with their help and guidance.

I was horrified when a short time later we were invited to attend an extraordinary meeting to review whether or not the Society, which I had so recently joined should continue! The details are lost to me now but I know that Stanley Allen was similarly horrified, I believe we must have said so at the meeting because we seemed to emerge from it as Treasurer and Chairman respectively! Stanley was inspirational due to his excellent organisational skills, dedication and enthusiasm. I remember that period as being busy and generally successful for the Society. We had a very good membership and attendances, we introduced new activities including RSPB film evenings at Steyning Grammar School and summer parties began at that time. As I recall Society field trips had something of a reputation for producing rain! However the annual summer party seemed to attract wonderful weather as well as most of the members. They were lovely events. I remember excellent ones at Stanley's and at Brianne's, oh wonderful summer pudding! We had one at our house in Ferring on such a warm and beautiful evening that we were still out in the garden at midnight.

There were also weightier matters. As a Society we were involved in various surveys and in several conservation and planning issues. Of these, for me, the most important was the tree planting project on Ferring Rife. Shortly before we moved there in 1982 Ferring had experienced two episodes of serious flooding. To prevent this reoccurring the water authority began work to widen the river, build levees and dig out overflow lagoons. When completed our much loved river banks of the Ferring Rife were reduced to an almost architectural landscape devoid of all shrubs and trees. Stanley and I began negotiations with the water authority with a view to planting native species on the banks at the outer end of the lagoons and on a mound created between the two lagoons. This was eventually agreed with the water authority generously providing the funds to buy the plants. Helped by my wife Patricia, the shrubs and trees were selected and the organisation of the planting was arranged. I remember counting out the batches of young saplings assigning them to each of the areas we had selected to plant. The day of the planting was something I shall always remember. So many members volunteered that it was easy to deploy them to the various planting sites together with their specific batches of plants. Due to this wonderful commitment from so many members the whole planting was completed in two days. Despite some warm dry summers and very cold winters many of the plants established themselves and the bushes added a potentially useful addition to the habitat of the Rife which apart from the coast itself was the primary bird site in Ferring. On a recent visit we found that willows, alders, blackthorn and hawthorn were doing well particularly on the mound between the two lagoons. It was pleasant to see Wllow / Chiffs, Whitethroat and Spotted Flycatchers there as well as Starlings, House Sparrows, Greenfinch and Goldfinch.



House Sparrow – *Rob Hume*

When we lived in Ferring my favourite time on the Rife was late summer to early autumn as summer migrants were moving south. I tried to walk the rife every day from mid August taking in the fields to the west and the area around the riding centre. As a teacher I was lucky always to be on holiday at that time although returning to work in early September just when migration seemed at its height was frustrating. Willow / Chiffs, Wheatear, Whinchat and Spotted Flycatcher were the most common species but it was always exciting to find something else such as a Pied Flycatcher or the very obliging Wryneck which showed well on the lawns of a house on the west side of the river one year.

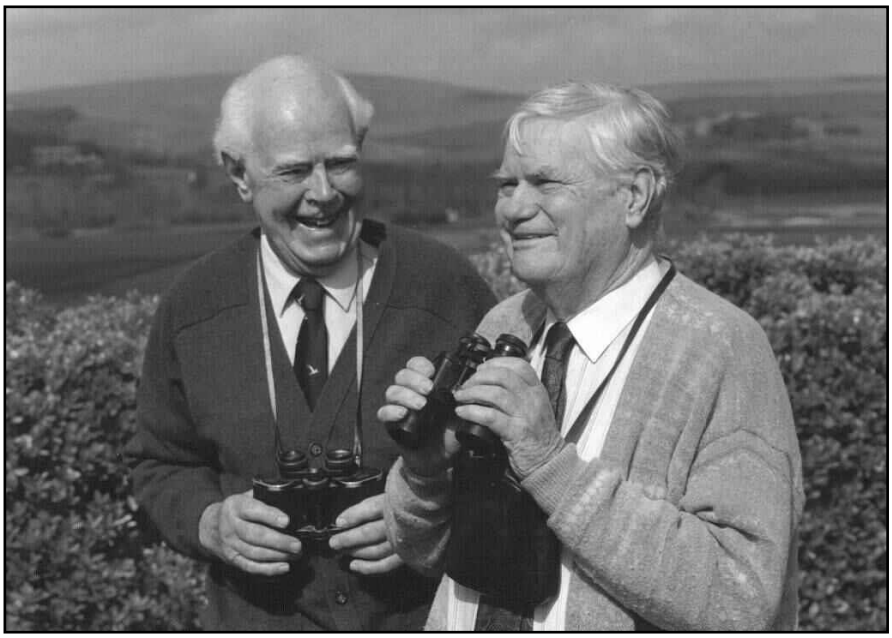
Willow Warbler in a Mill Hill garden – *Stanley Allen*

In winter one could hope for Snipe, and a range of other waders on the roost, which sometimes moved to fields around Kingston Gorse from their more usual site at Goring Gap and for the very occasional Short Eared Owl or Jack Snipe. Several of our winters in Ferring during the mid to late 1980's were very severe with prolonged freezing temperatures, which froze the sea and covered the Rife with pack ice. There were exciting moments such as the time a Woodcock came into our garden but it was also tragic to find so many waders perished along the foreshore. October 1987 brought the great storm. Our telephone was out of action and all roads out of the village were blocked. I was wandering near the duck pond in a truly shocked state when someone saw the bins around my neck and said "You must be interested in birds, have this." 'This' was an injured Storm Petrel in

a cake box! We kept it overnight in the airing cupboard and released it on the beach next morning.
Sadly for me my work took me away from Ferring and for many years I did not venture back even to monitor the progress of the trees and bushes we had planted. Last year I returned and was pleased with the progress. Now I look forward to retirement. Returning to live in Ferring and rejoining the SDOS, if they will have me . Oh, and what did I miss on the evening of May 12th 1980? Only one of the biggest movements of Poms, other Skuas and Black Terns ever seen along the Sussex coast!

A talk on birds *Stanley Allen*

In the late 1960's, Peggy and I read an advert in the Steyning Herald; a Dr John Stafford was to give a talk on Birds, on behalf of the RSPB, in the old Shoreham Town Hall on the next Saturday afternoon. Our interest in birds had increased because our large garden in Steyning attracted many varieties, including all three Woodpeckers at once.



Stanley Allen and John Stafford - *Shoreham Herald*

We have vivid memories of that lecture, and in particular, the lecturer – the urbane, dark-haired, handsome doctor. What he talked about is lost in our memory in the mists of time, but we recall some excellent slides in that packed hall.

Little did I think, when enjoying that John Stafford lecture, that some 25 years later I would have the privilege of succeeding him as President of SDOS !

That afternoon we heard that there was a local ornithological society, and although it was called the Shoreham Ornithological Society, we were told that it's recording area included

Steyning. This was great, just what we wanted we thought. We applied by letter to the secretary to join; back came the somewhat curt reply – there is a long waiting list – we'll place your names on it – full stop !

We had both almost forgotten about our application, when one day a letter arrived asking if we still wished to join, and if so, please fill in the form etc. This was in the mid-70's. We applied, and back came the programme for the year – and a key for the *north* gate to the Sanctuary – in those days access was from the A283, across the field, to a gate at the north west corner.

Peggy and I started to attend the indoor meetings, at Huntingdon Hall, in Buckingham Road, Shoreham, and we both recall that no one took any notice of us; but everything changed when we went on our first outing – to Cissbury Ring, the leader – one B F Forbes, who was kindness itself to us, ignorant newcomers. And it was a famous outing – the star bird a Red Kite right over our heads.

A few years later, in 1981, the Society's hierarchy decided that the Society had probably better be disbanded, due to falling numbers, and lack of support. A Special Meeting was called. Peggy and I were very upset, as we had become very happy members, fully enjoying all indoor and outdoor meetings; we decided that we must try and oppose the proposal to close the Society. But there was a snag; on the date of the meeting, I knew that I would be having an operation in hospital. So I told a highly nervous wife that she must act as my 'brief', and get up at the meeting and vigorously oppose the motion to wind-up. I wrote the speech, and rehearsed it with her till she almost knew it by heart !

The next morning , Peggy arrived at the hospital; 'what happened ?'.'They are going to carry on – but – they want you to be Treasurer'. Big joke, because I have difficulty in adding up 2 and 2 ! But I was glad that I could play a part in resuscitation of the Society.

The Society then started to grow again, and we moved our indoor meetings to St Giles Church Hall. We changed the Society's name by adding the word 'District' – a recognition that we recorded in a much larger area than Shoreham itself.

21 years on from that 1981 low point, I like to think that we have a happy and successful Society. I think we fill a useful niche in the Sussex ornithological set-up, and our membership total of around the 160 mark is ideal.

But we do not just watch birds; in our rules, the Society's main aim is clearly stated as "the protection of birds and their environment, especially within….our recording area". To this end, constant vigilance by our members is needed, so that we can try to protect the birds and their various habitats from the constant pressures which one meets in 21st century Britain. Our voice is listened to in the various planning departments; in particular we have representation on the West Sussex County Council committee formed to study and protect Widewater, which, at the first meeting of that committee was described by Bob Edgar of English Nature as "this unique and remarkable asset, which desperately needs protection". We have been on a committee which has been studying the Cement Works, and which produced an Environmental blue print, which may have some influence on the

forthcoming planning appeal by the developers. Over the past twenty years, we have successfully resisted a number of local planning applications, which we felt were likely to destroy habitats.

I particularly recall the application for a Golf Driving range at New Salts Farm. At the planning enquiry, I gave evidence for SDOS. I mentioned that a number of unusual birds had been seen on that site, including Yellow Browed Warbler, and Cetti's. The inspector seemed particularly interested in the Cetti's. At the end of the enquiry, he announced that he would visit the site the next morning, and 'Mr. Allen, I would like you to be there'.

So all parties – applicant, various Counsel, – and me – stood on New Salts Farm Road that next day, and the first thing the Inspector said – 'Mr. Allen where *is* the Cetti's Warbler'. I was able to point out the bush where I had *heard* it ! That was enough for the Inspector – in his written report turning down the application, that Cetti's was given a prominent mention !

Long before we joined SDOS, our interest in birds was kindled by a chance visit to what can only be described as 'the dump' – a waste disposal site where the Adur Rec now stands, and where John Stafford carried out ringing; I can see him now, showing my family and I, in his hand – a Bluethroat. There have been many memorable bird 'days' for us in our recording area, starting with the Red Kite mentioned above. What a list it is; the Sociable Plover in Ricardo's field ; the Great Spotted Cuckoo also in that area; the Little Bittern at Horn Lane, the Crane at Small Dole. A brief sighting of a Spoonbill near the Toll Bridge, and on a windy winter's afternoon a grand view of a Leach's Petrel in the same river area. Then more recently, my very own Sussex tick – an Alpine Swift over Beeding Hill. One will never forget the White Stork which we saw from near the Sanctuary – and the memorable sight of John Newnham running to keep up with it ! Finally, in our area, a good view of a Richard's Pipit on Hove Lawns, and a Woodchat Shrike near the Sanctuary. Out of the area, but still in Sussex, I suppose my rarest sighting was the Trumpeter Finch at Pagham – seen just before it was eaten by a Sparrowhawk; - (or was the Sora also at Pagham even rarer ?) and vivid memories of the Desert Wheatear at Selsey, and a Black Wheatear at Newhaven. I shall never forget my first Pallas's Warbler (at Clymping), the Blackpoll Warbler at Bewl Water (I saw it seconds before Bernie did !) News of many of these birds came to us over the SDOS ' bush telegraph' – a precursor of our own budding e-mail service.

We had to wait a long time to become members, but joining SDOS has given us many great days of happy birdwatching, and above all that sense of unique friendship which this great hobby generates, and so - Happy birthday, dear SDOS, and long may you flourish.

I used to watch birds from my pram *Roger Wilmshurst*

My mother told me I used to watch birds from my pram and I remember being able to name the Chaffinches and Bullfinches I saw in my Primary School playground. At that school, in the same class was another Roger (Ruston) and a boy called James Moxham both of whom became good friends later in our school life. Roger Ruston moved to

Portsmouth and we did not meet again until our late teens.

I remember James Moxham selling lizards in the school playground at 3d. each, I had never seen a lizard and he showed me where he had caught them. Our friendship developed through our fascination with natural things. When we moved on to Irene Avenue School our interest in birds was encouraged by a teacher called Miss Dawson who lived in a farm cottage in Hoe Court, owned by Lancing College. She had a great influence on both of us, taking us on birding trips where we developed our knowledge of birds in particular and we learned about many facets of natural history from her awareness of all that was going on around her.

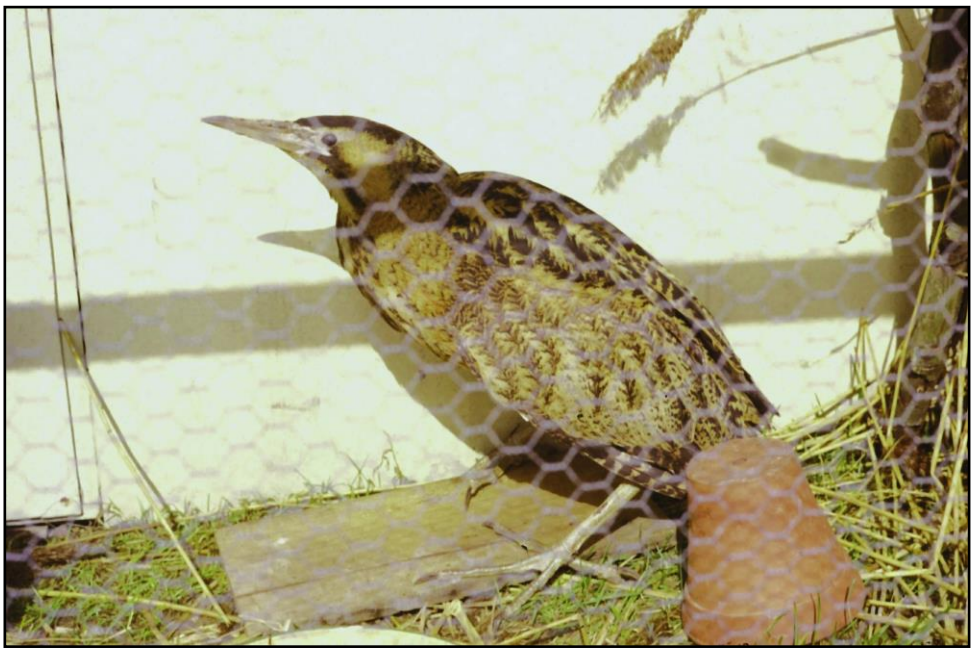
Roger Ruston eventually went to Steyning Grammar School where he met Tony Marr and Dave Wells and the birders from Portsmouth, so many of whom became influential in the birding world (and are still acknowledged bird authorities). Dave Wells helped to write the Malayan Handbook of Birds.

I went to Ardingly College where I met Peter Fullagar who, later, was involved in the writing of the Australian Handbook of Birds. My Biology master at Ardingly was always very helpful and positive about my hobby but in Art I was criticised because I only wanted to draw birds.

I met Dr. Stafford through Tony Marr and I used to see Mr. Twort and Mr. Severs on the Adur riverbank when they were birdwatching. In 1953 when the Society was founded I was 13 years old. I was always interested in birds and remember at that time, and two or three years on, that there were Red-backed Shrikes nesting in the hawthorn scrub by Lancing Ring (known locally as The Clump), the scrub stretched from The Clump to what we called "the little wood" and to the south, down to Fircroft. Much of the land at that time was not built on. The lizards were very common and must have been a ready food supply for the shrikes. I am not sure how many pairs there were but I found several nests. I even found a nest in the hedge along Boundstone Lane next to the rough ground where Boundstone School is now situated.

I took an external London Degree at Brighton Technical College in Zoology and Botany but I am not a scientist at heart. Whilst there I was again encouraged by another lecturer, Miss Heriot, Head of Biology who was interested and approved of the drawings I did. She was an accomplished artist and is still selling her work even though she is ninety years old.
After my degree Chris Mead introduced me to the BTO where I shared work on the population status of birds with Kenneth Williamson. It was the time, in the mid sixties, when the Common Bird Census began and also the great worries brought about by the overuse of pesticides and their effect on birds.

The 1962/63 winter was notable for its severity. On 13th January 1963 a schoolboy brought me a starving Bittern. He had been travelling back from Steyning Grammar School to Lancing along the road adjacent to the brooks by the airport between Shoreham and Lancing. He had spotted the bird from the top of the bus, and got off at the next stop to recover it. Luckily he was wearing glasses, because the bird struck at his eyes. Apparently all the heron family will do this if cornered.



The rescued Bittern – *John Stafford*

When I was given the bird it was just a bag of bones, I kept it in a shed with an aviary built on. Initially it fed on sprats. It was interesting to watch it feed. I had to put the fish in water, and it would stalk them as if they were alive and then strike. It soon put on weight and eventually I was able to feed it on whole herrings, which it swallowed in one. Towards the end of the winter the bird had gained a considerable amount of weight. Chris Mead worked for the ringing section of the British Trust for Ornithology and he came and put a BTO coloured ring on it. He then took it to Minsmere in Suffolk where it was released. Apparently it was seen quite regularly over 18 months after its release. By 1972 I had become involved with the Antique business, I stripped out an old barn as premises from which I could work. However I became very ill and whilst in bed I thought about photography, so I decided to start with Super 8 Cine (16mm was only used commercially and was far too expensive). Since then I have moved on to many different cameras for still and video work: Olympus OM1, Hasselblad, Leitz with a 560 mm lens and a 400 mm lens on a Contax camera.. Now I use Canon equipment.. My work has gone out through two agencies, Bruce Coleman Ltd., and Frank Lane Picture Agency run by David and Jean Hosking, and also eight agencies abroad.

Roger Wilmshurst at Selsey 1960 – *Richard Porter*

Now I have moved into Digital and all that entails. I shall keep moving on!

Black Grouse taken early in the morning in freezing conditions. To get this photograph the hide was occupied before daylight – *Roger Wilmshurst*

As far as books are concerned I started off, as almost everyone did, using The *Observer's Book of Birds*, then in the 50's the *Peterson Field Guide*. I bought *Witherby* at WHS for 7guineas and later *Walpole Bond* from John Reynolds, and I use the large *Collins Bird Guide*. I have always liked Tunnicliffe and have collected his books since I was at school I particularly like the early *Ladybird* individual books of the seasons illustrated by Tunnicliffe. Also any book by Eric Hosking would be added to my collection.

Slavonian Grebe – *Eric Hosking*

My hobby which has given me so much pleasure has become my profession too and as the two can be combined, it is a very happy arrangement.

No tuition in Art *From an interview with John Reaney*

I had no tuition in Art at my school, none until I went to Evening Classes at Brighton Art College in the 1960's. Drawing took over but not exactly as I had planned. I spent twenty years in a Drawing Office in Portslade and for the last two years I was in charge of ……just me!

Richard Porter had bought two of my paintings when he was working for the RSPB and he came to ask me to re-do them as they had come away from their backing. It was the day I had left work in 1975 and he suggested I should go freelance, he was sure the RSPB would want to use my work. I took his advice and the RSPB used my illustrations, I had exhibitions in places like Abinger House and Woods Mill and sold many of my exhibits.

John Reaney looking down on the river Adur – *Richard Porter*

Little Owl – *John Reaney*

Besides birds and landscapes I love to draw mammals, especially concentrating on their fur. My favourite medium is watercolour, though the pen and ink sketches also give me great satisfaction. I have supplied these for the Newsletters and Reports of the Sussex and Shoreham Ornithological Societies for many years. I have enjoyed doing illustrations for a number of books: "Birds of Sussex" (SOS), "The Kestrel" by Mike Shrubb, an anthology of poems on birds called "Flights of Imagination" compiled by Mike Mockler and I am also in "20th Century Wildlife Artists" by Nicholas Hammond. I was made a Member of the Society of Wildlife Artists in 1986.
Although I go all over Sussex to make my preliminary sketches I finish them at home in the house in Brighton in which I have lived for sixty-three years.

Discovering the SOS *Pauline Griffiths*

When I was bird watching on Farnes in the early autumn of 1957 I met a young woman who said she came from Sussex. When I told her I was going to a new job in Worthing the following January she said I simply must join the Shoreham Ornithological Society. Her enthusiasm was unbounded and by November I had become a member. I think the annual subscription then was 7/6d. (38p). I went to my first meeting in the Huntingdon Hall (where all indoor meetings were held until we grew out of it) in January 1958 and was welcomed and made to feel very much at home by Kitty Biggs, then in her seventies, a joint founder and secretary of the Society.

Kitty (Catherine) Biggs in 1961 with a suspected John Newnham lying down on the beach behind - *John Stafford*

Brimming with energy and enthusiasm she took a warm, personal interest in all members, which did so much to create a real 'club' atmosphere. Kitty lived with her twin brother and

their (slightly rounder) sister in a pleasant house on Mill Hill. They cultivated a large garden, grew a lot of soft fruit and kept bees, which would have been quite a daunting commitment for people half their age. I was fairly often invited for afternoon tea and on one occasion they had just finished making l00 lbs of marmalade. Tea was taken sitting at a round table covered with a beautifully embroidered linen cloth. There was always brown and white bread and butter and at least three sorts of cake. The silver teapot was accompanied by a silver kettle on a stand with a little methylated spirit flame beneath it to keep the water hot. It took me back to my early childhood at my Grandmother's house. By a strange coincidence it turned out that Kitty had once taught at the school I went to 25 years later.

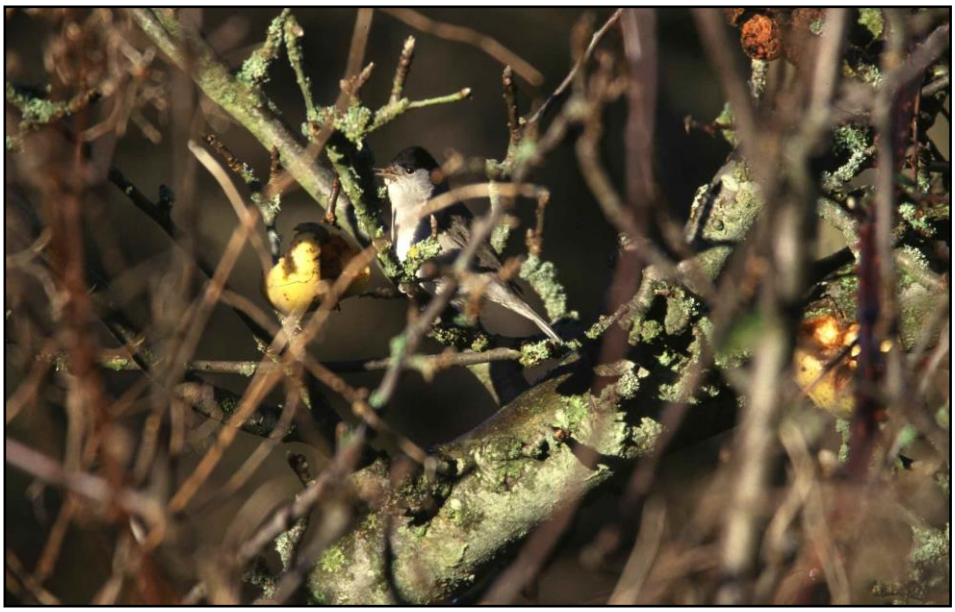
The other joint founder of the Society and first chairman was Dr. John Stafford — a distinguished ornithologist who had been on scientific expeditions and had served on the Council of the RSPB. In spite of the demands of a general practice he gave a lot of time to the Society and was always approachable, sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm. Between them they laid the foundations for what the Society is today.

Nightjar – *John Stafford*

Born of the most stalwart supporters were a group of retired men: the names I remember were messrs Severs, Twort, Palmer, Burstow, Rampton and Forbes (Bernie's father). Tom Palmer had been the head gardener on a large estate and fascinated us with "Victorian Kitchen Garden" anecdotes. Mr. Burstow was a very keen long distance cyclist and Mr. Rampton, who was the Treasurer, had lost both legs in the war and used to sit at the door collecting dues etc. At the other end of the age range was a group of extremely enthusiastic teenage boys: Tony Marr, John Newnham, Bernie Forbes and Alan Kitson among others.

On one field trip to Amberley Wild Brooks Kitty Biggs asked me to be personally responsible for one of the boys (who shall be nameless): "If you don't keep an eye on him all the time he'll fall into a ditch full of water." I'm afraid I didn't and he did! Sometimes Frank Forbes asked me if I could give Bernie a lift to field outings. I remember a quiet, very serious youngster of about 13 telling me about his garden birds and the food he put out for them.

There were others too, from the early days some of whom are happily still with us. Barrie Watson who did so much work including ringing at the Sanctuary, Mrs. Farmer (who later became Secretary), Brian Clay, Colin Messer, Mr. Meadows and his son Martin, Mrs. Gillett, the Goddards, the Dixons, Mr. and Mrs. Helyer, Brian and Hilda Metcalfe, Sylvia Pargeter, Dorothy Stringfellow and a young woman called Valerie Lyon who taught at a Prep school near Hassocks and who once led a walk through woodland that she studied near the school.



A Blackcap well hidden in woodland – *Keith Noble*

Later on I joined the Committee and became joint Field Secretary with Tony Marr. Tony and a few other young men initiated a systematic study of Selsey Bill. They lived in a converted chicken house at the edge of the shingle and were particularly interested in migratory movements. These proved to be so impressive that Tony was very keen that a field outing should be arranged for Society members to share the experience. It was mid October and Tony insisted we should be there before dawn. We organised a coach to leave Brighton about 5am. and pick them up en route. One of our members was an elderly lady who never missed a field trip, she always carried a plastic shopping bag and was renowned for her gritty determination and down to earth approach. She lived in Hove and was on her way to the coach (in pitch darkness and heavy rain) when she was spotted by two constables in a patrol car. Thinking she might be in need of care and protection, they

spoke to her and took an awful lot of convincing that she really was going bird watching! When it dried up and the sun came out and I remember the excitement when we saw a Collared Dove — possibly the first in Sussex?

I shared the job of organising field outings with Mr. Burstow and we decided to arrange a dawn chorus meeting. Sadly the dawn chorus now is nothing like the mind blowing experience it was when I was young. Ambitiously we planned to walk to the top of Chanctonbury and cook bacon and eggs when we got there! It meant a lot of carrying and we only did it once.

A sort of field telegraph system went into action when anything unusual turned up — a Whinchat at the airport, a Nightjar nesting on the Downs. I remember the excitement when John Newnham (as a schoolboy) found a Little Bittern at Steyning. One winter there was a huge influx of Waxwings . We found them in the hawthorn bushes around the Adur and the airfield. Beautiful birds and so fearless we could put binoculars away and walk up to them. I used to visit the Sanctuary quite regularly until a stranger chased me up the hill one day and I never went there alone again!
Field outings generally took place between September and May and were within a radius of about 30 miles or so of Shoreham.

An early day outing to Pagham. In the middle at the back are John Burstow and Kitty (Catherine) Biggs – *John Stafford*

Sometimes we went further afield and on one occasion Tony Marr was to lead an outing to the New Forest. My job was to organise a coach from Brighton with the usual pick-up points. Tony was joining in Southwick and imagine my horror when the coach arrived in

Worthing with no Tony on board. Yes, they had waited. No, they hadn't seen any sign of him. I only had a vague description of our precise destination ("don't worry I'll be on the coach anyway") and there I was responsible for a coach load of people heading west! Eventually I directed the driver off the main road and we finished up in a lay-by on a very quiet track in the heart of the Forest.

Still no Tony. Were we in the right place? Mike Wellings was with us and I asked if he would lead the group, if the worst came to the worst, he didn't know the area and was very reluctant. I suggested we all go our own way but stay within earshot of the coach horn. To my HUGE relief Tony arrived an hour later. He had missed the coach, followed on his motor scooter, had engine trouble and called into a garage. All was forgiven and we had a very good day. No mobile phones in those days.

I left in 1974 to work in London but returned to Worthing in 1980. Thereafter, because of domestic circumstances, much of my bird watching was confined to our garden, which was relatively large but nevertheless suburban. Apart from the "usual" garden birds (including magpies and sparrow hawks) I am amazed at some of the birds that I saw in or flying around the garden: Firecrest, Kestrel, Grey Partridge, Pheasant, Grey Heron, Black Headed Gull, Herring Gull, Stock Dove, Tawny Owl, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Grey Wagtail, Blackcap (winter and in summer), Fieldfare, Redwing, Ring Ouzel, Long Tailed Tit, Bullfinch, Siskin, Jay and so on. Over the years, Herring Gulls became a breeding species on neighbouring roofs and Parakeets flew noisily over the gate in the summer, while Song Thrushes and House Sparrows became rarities.

In terms of a lifetime, half a century is an immensely long time. I am amazed that some of the events of the early years of the SDOS are as vivid to me now as though they had happened yesterday. The Society has achieved a distinguished place in local ornithology. It has done much to encourage young naturalists and to enrich the lives of us all. Long may it continue.

Tawny Owl - *Keith Noble*

Dawn Chorus *J M Twort*

To hear the dawn chorus we went to Chanctonbury
And among our members was a certain Dr. Perry.
The first bird that we heard was a farmyard fowl
Then the Tawny and the Little Owl
Some members and myself heard the skulking Corncrake
When some notes in a book I hurriedly did make
Many common birds we saw including Blackbird and Thrush
But we never saw or heard that Chanctonbury Chough
For breakfast we had Eggs and Bacon and even fried Bread
And we continued watching after we had fed
Soon we broke up and were on our way
And may our Club continue for many a long day

J M Twort using a draw tube telescope - *John Stafford*

A life-long involvement with birds *Barrie Watson*

I was brought up in rural West Sussex and went to school in Chichester. I had always been interested in natural history. When I went to London to study medicine I joined the London Natural History Society and gravitated towards the Ornithological section. Thus began what has turned out to be a life-long involvement with birds. In 1966 I came to live

in Shoreham, joining the practice in which John Stafford was a partner, and naturally I was introduced to the Shoreham Ornithological Society.

I had already trained as a bird ringer at Bird Observatories such as Skokholm, Dungeness (under Bert Axell), and Portland, and had set up the Chichester Ringing Group. This operated at the Gravel Pits and later at Church Norton. I continued to ring at the Chichester end of the county, but of course I quickly became involved in ringing at the Shoreham Sanctuary and other local patches. I have always been interested in large-scale projects designed to provide useful information on birds and for conservation. The Wildfowl Trust wanted more information on Mute Swans, as little was known about their individual movements and longevity. They offered free rings, so I used 500 or so across SE England.

The Chichester Ringing Group started with the national Sand Martin Enquiry, and we ringed over 30,000 martins in four seasons. This yielded enough recaptures to show the migration routes within the UK and down through Europe. Then the Reed and Sedge Warbler Enquiries followed, showing patterns of pre-migratory weight gain. Cooperative migration studies have taken me ringing in France, Spain, Portugal, Senegal and USA, these expeditions often being combined with family holidays.

In 1977 I discovered a group of MAFF scientists cannon-netting gulls on the Worthing and Hove beaches, in order to make comparisons with studies they had carried out around London. They agreed to train me in this rather specialised technique, and loaned a set of equipment; then with a team of local ringers we went from strength to strength (see John Newnham's article). We were able to plot the breeding areas in Europe of the Black-headed Gulls which winter on our beaches. We caught a Mediterranean Gull, less common in those days, which had been ringed in Belgium. The next one, caught on Sompting Rubbish Tip and ringed by us, was later reported breeding in the Camargue in a colony of Slender-billed Gulls!

Since retirement I have become interested in Barn Owl conservation in Sussex. Again ringing, mainly at nest boxes, provides the necessary information on productivity, movements, longevity and causes of death. The Sussex FWAG advisor regularly asks me to provide and erect owl nest boxes for farmers, and I monitor nest box schemes set up by the Sussex Downs Conservation Board, English Nature, the Environment Agency and WSCC. As a result I visit some wonderful old Sussex barns and meet interesting people who are keen to help the Barn Owls survive in their area. Many barns are converted to dwellings nowadays, so planning applications must be scanned in the local papers and I try to help with any problems that arise. Local councils often stipulate that provision is made for owls within, or close to, the finished building. In one case building work had to stop on part of a site for 11 weeks as I discovered nesting Barn Owls with young. Elsewhere there was a group of derelict farm buildings with owls nesting in the barn roof. Planning permission had already been granted, but the owner was concerned for the owls, so I put up tree boxes across the field from the barn. The owls moved straight in and produced six chicks so that when the conversion began the owls were safely out of the way!

A Barn Owl being ringed – *Barrie Watson*

Being allowed to ring birds is a great privilege, and brings many rewards. It is difficult to pick out the highlights. There were the occasional Bluethroats and Aquatic Warblers trapped at Chichester, the Firecrest caught in my garden, and the exotics handled abroad. However I get just as much pleasure from handling the common resident and migrant species and learning more about them. I am grateful to those who trained me, and hope that the many ringers I have trained will enjoy their hobby as much.

The Mecca for birders *Richard Ives*

Every autumn since 1983 there has been an SDOS presence on the Mecca for birders: the Scilly Isles. Here are a few anecdotes showing the highs of birding in Cornwall's finest area for rare birds.

The Highs Despite some wonderful birdwatching days in the local area my best record was undoubtedly on the final morning of a Scilly Island trip in 1984- October 20th it was. The bags had been left at the airport and a few of us decided to walk around the edge of the airport before embarking on the trip home. It was apparent that there had been a significant arrival of autumn thrushes overnight as there were numerous Redwings and Fieldfares in the trees and on the bulb fields near St Mary's airfield. Suddenly one perched bird caught my eye - it was different from the birds around it - it shared the marked eye stripe of its neighbouring Redwings but there were differences in the face pattern, a greyish head and the breast was not distinctly marked but was of a russety hue. The others got onto it very quickly and the truth began to dawn that this bird was a most welcome arrival from Siberia: an Eye-browed Thrush! Notes were taken and we had to rush back to the airport. Once the news broke there was total chaos - people who had just left the Scillies

caught the first available plane back, those farther afield tried to fly into St Mary's. The whole island was alerted and every bird watcher on the islands made haste to reach the site where we had found the bird. From the airplane we could see people running hither and thither trying to get a glimpse of this elusive thrush - we were pleased to have left before the mad rush ensued. It was the 12th record of this lovely bird in Britain and it still remains one of the most sought after species in the country. It was just one of those days!
Dave Smith and I spend hours sitting looking out to sea expectantly in all weathers and all seasons hoping, just hoping, that something special flies by. This is what happened one year on Scilly, 19th October 1986 - the weather was foul - a strong wind, threatening rain and very little activity on the passerine front. Having exhausted all the sheltered spots and having found very little we decided to seek solace in a seawatch. We didn't have to wait long for the "biggie" to arrive. When I say big, I mean big! We had just got our eyes accustomed to the light and calibrated our eyes to the relative sizes of Gannets and auks when Eric Soden said "Albatross ******". We thought he was reminiscing about a Monty Python sketch but as he was such a mild mannered man who never uses expletives we thought that something must be going on. Sure enough in the distance a huge shearing beast was moving towards us. It dwarfed the Gannets as it sheared on stiff dark wings towards us. With hardly a flap it made rapid headway into the wind - shining white under parts and jet black wings- a magnificent creature and surely the gold medal in any sea watch. This Black-browed Albatross alone in the vast expanse of sea (and the Northern Hemisphere as well, as probably this was the only bird north of the Equator) sheared ever westwards and remained etched in the memory banks for ever.

The Lows The infamous trio of Bernie Forbes, Dave Smith and myself decided to stick to mainland Cornwall in 1993 to find our own birds and not to be trampled underfoot if we managed to find something worthy of note. The Arctic Warbler which had graced the garden of our rented cottage the week before had departed just before we got there and that should have been an omen that it was not going to be plain sailing. There was very little visible migration and we spent every hour of daylight scouring the valleys hoping to find a special rarity - our luck seemed to have run out. One afternoon, after yet another fruitless tour of the deserted valleys, we decided to make use of the fine late afternoon for a final walk up the road just in case. There was little of note when suddenly we picked up across the valley a small thrush - it was too small for a Song Thrush. The pulse rate increased, a *Catharus* thrush but which one? Grey Cheeked? Swainson's - too dull for a Veery. It flew from the dry stone wall and was lost from sight. Despite extensive searching we never saw the bird again - the bitter frustration of being so close yet not being able to clinch the final identification. These sobering moments bring home just how fine the line between elation and utter dejection is; we missed a chance to celebrate by a whisker and that Thrush, whatever it was, never made it into the birding journals although it had made it across the Atlantic. That's just the way it goes .....

Another Miss Close To Home February 1997 Dave Smith and I had decided to search the area as the snow cover and the frozen waterways would make it easier to find any species which had been brought in by the bad weather. There were a couple of red headed Smews on the Adur and we had the thrill of seeing a flock of Goosanders moving up through the Adur Valley at Cuckoo Corner - what a terrific sight! We decided to scorch the Ladywells area just in case there was something feeding along the unfrozen part of the stream. The snow crunched underfoot as we followed the stream. Suddenly we both

caught sight of a tiny rail as it dashed out from behind some phragmites and then splashed into the water and dived under the ice. We waited and waited yet nothing reappeared - this master of evasiveness had eluded us and was never seen again. We inspected the footprints in the snow - the tiny gallinule imprints were there - a reminder that the Shoreham area had probably had a new species to be added to its tally but alas a glimpse and nothing more, would suffice - a Little Crake or a Baillon's Crake ? There will never be an answer to that question - did the bird drown under the ice or was this tiny escapologist just too cunning to escape detection - yet another near miss!

The moment I became addicted …. *Richard Ives*

There are probably critical moments in people's lives when an event changes their perception of life and makes them move in a certain direction - I can remember vividly one moment which caused the seed of interest in birds to germinate and grow into a passion which has been with me for the last 35 years. I used to ride around the local area on my bicycle and I was always keen to see unusual species on Brooklands; Scaup, Jack Snipe, Long-tailed Duck; they were all fascinating species but they did not fire up the emotions as did the predator that was living on Sompting Brooks in 1967. I used to hop over the barbed wire fence, strategically placed to keep out young boys, and squelch my way through the muddy fields following the stream disturbing the odd Water Rail and

Great Grey Shrike – *Rob Hume*

Snipe. It was November and the reedbeds were quiet and then suddenly I noticed ahead of me a large grey bird with a Lone Ranger mask and a long dark tail. It peered down at me and I was transfixed - I didn't realise that a combination of grey and black could produce such a fine creature - it was magnificent. Beautiful, yet deadly. The black, hooked bill showed that this bird meant business. There, in the next bush were a few Linnets

pretending to be at ease but they knew that this visitor to their peaceful world was not there to admire the view. Within a split second the bird had sped across the few yards separating the two bushes and impaled one of the Linnets on the thorns of the hawthorn before the unfortunate victim had time to move. I had witnessed a kill from just a few yards away and could not tear myself away from this rather gruesome scene. The Great Grey Shrike had lived up to its name as a butcher bird and I realised the grim reality of the food chain - some have to be sacrificed to keep others alive. This moment remains as vivid today as it did when I was just 12 years old. Fortunately this bird (or another) returned there the following few winters and I even found one along the Steyning railway. This bird symbolised those crisp, cold winter days of my youth and I always felt a quickening of the pulse whenever I came face to face with the masked killing machine. I should be grateful for that experience all those years ago as from that moment I became totally hooked and have never looked back. My hobby has taken me to various countries and has enriched my life beyond comprehension. For all of you reading this you know exactly what I mean - you too have been bitten by the bug and like some invasive creature it takes over your soul and your perception of life and long may it do so.

I came to bird watching through ….. *L R Keen*

As very young village lads my friend and I started collecting eggs, as did many other village boys, and eggs were exchanged as we did cigarette cards. I did marvel at my covert collection and I remember the great number of variations in the markings on Blackbirds' eggs and the thrill of finding a Cuckoo's egg in a Dunnock's nest. Oologists' sales lists were printed in the daily papers and I well remember buying a few with my meagre pocket money. I was amazed at the size of the Herring Gull's egg and the mottled beauty of the Redshank's.

I don't think that this phase lasted very long as compulsory Sunday school and disapproving sisters helped turn me against it and in the early 1950s I joined the RSPB. What a thrill it was to have the odd record printed in the JBRC magazine alongside the names of some of the illustrious birdwatchers of today.

In 1954 Lady Tweedsmuir's Bill was passed and became the Protection of Birds Act. This was to give complete protection to all nesting birds but within four months the Home Office scheduled a list of common birds whose eggs could be taken. This was to prevent the criminalising of small boy egg takers. I'm not sure which year this was rescinded.
My first record book starts in the severe weather of Spring 1947 (when aged 11 years) with a note on Canada Geese and Redshanks. In 1949 I watched my first pair of Red-backed Shrikes at their nest and at grammar school one of my favourite birds – the House Martin – had an established colony of over thirty pairs. One day a bird, on leaving its nest, caught its foot in grass entwined in the mud of the nest. It dangled helplessly, calling in alarm whereupon its mate put its head out, saw its plight and head-butted it free. Alas, two weeks later at another nest, a bird trapped in the same manner dangled down dead.

My early notes seem to contain more behaviour notes than in later years, probably as a result of the many more hours available to me to just stand and observe. I remember watching two Swans flying down a narrow stream to land. As they came down, one bird (an adult) veered off and landed in a ploughed field, whilst the other (a juvenile) landed on the stream, just wide enough for its wingspan. What I considered unusual was the action of

a Kestrel on one September day. It was being mobbed by many small birds when it suddenly flew violently up and down at them until they all dispersed. It then flew off unmolested. This is the only record I have of a harried bird "losing its temper".

The early notes contain frequent sightings of Nuthatches, Treecreepers, Coal and Marsh Tits, Bullfinches, Stock Doves, Owls and Turtle Doves. In 1952 I regularly counted Turtle Doves feeding in harvested fields. Their numbers built up daily to reach eighty on one hot August day. Three Tree Sparrow colonies were within cycling distance as was a small Cirl Bunting population.

Each new species identified was a memorable day (and still is) but perhaps Hoopoe and Avocet were a bit special. When in the Farnborough area it was common to see up to twenty-five Mistle Thrushes perched but on a day when a jet screeched over low, nearly eighty took to the air. Another memorable sighting in May 1953 were the thirteen Buzzards in the air over a half-mile stretch of Devon hillside and with another seven close by.

I have always found Rooks and their rookeries of great interest and in the late 1950s undertook a survey of the population in three local valleys, an area of some fifty square miles. For three consecutive Springs, I cycled up and down the valleys counting over one thousand two hundred nests in forty-three rookeries. I was particularly interested in the desertions of certain rookeries and the establishment of new ones.

Over the years I have had many favourite "patches" – areas or features close at hand where breeding birds and vagrants can be recorded over a period of time. These are sites often visited with a great expectancy of encountering the rare or unusual species.

Inland, these have been lakes, gravel pits, reservoirs, streams, various house gardens and bush-clad hillside. This latter site was the home of a pair of Red-backed Shrikes for several years in the 1960s and I could see the cock bird perched from my bedroom window. Even then the species was in decline. I helped at the mist netting/ringing of this pair but only a juvenile was caught. How well I remember the hen and four young all hunting from fences and hedgerows on warm August days. Yet another "patch" was the "Firing Ranges", open scrubby heathland where a small number of Woodlarks could be found.

In Sussex (from 1965) favourite "patches" have been the Widewater area, various parks and house gardens and the Benfield Valley. A small garden behind busy Boundary Road in Hove – a mile from the sea – was so rewarding with Woodcock, Wheatear, Firecrest, Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts among those seen. At Mile Oak on the edge of the Downs, I was able to record Grasshopper Warbler, Corn and Reed Buntings and nesting Stonechats, as well as a House Martin colony which has now declined from a peak of forty-seven pairs in 1974 to just five this year.

This January, I made a trip to Australia to see the birds at the other end of the globe. How wonderful that birds like the Thick Knee can nest in a public park on the ground and be unmolested by dogs or gangs of youths. Although not strictly a bird watching holiday I still managed to identify sixty-five incredible and memorable species but would I swap all those records for just one sight of a Hawfinch or a Wryneck? That's difficult!

Cirl Bunting – *John Reaney*

Licence to go anywhere *Peter Catchpole*

During my time at Lancing College Cirl Buntings were not rare. I can remember finding two nests one afternoon in the hedges/bushes on the Dyke field. Hobby hawk nested at Chanctonbury Ring one year and we marked the eggs with an indelible pencil but they still got taken. Sparrowhawks nested in the Ladywell Valley near the shooting butts. We used the long ladders from the Chapel to get up the tree to ring them for John Stafford. During this time badgers were also living in the Ladywell Valley.

It was from our trips to Monks House that we became "ringers" at Lancing, encouraged by John Stafford who lent us rings to use (a brave gesture). This was a licence to go anywhere in the grounds. We used to catch Black Redstarts, a few we caught around the east end of the Chapel on mouldy bread in March/April time. The bread attracted loads of small flies, which attracted the Black Redstarts. These were trapped in a small cage we made in the carpentry shop.

Every year a Kestrel nested on the window ledge at the east end of the Chapel, too high for us to see. We did get our first recovery of a Kestrel which we ringed in a barn on the Downs, a red-letter day.

We also used to catch Little Grebes in a creek off the Adur River near the lower field at low tide. By getting into the river unseen and wading up the creek with a fishing landing net we caught them as they tried to escape. One Sunday, in my Sunday suit, the water was too deep and it soaked my trousers, this was just before evensong. I managed to swap trousers with a colleague and carry the processional banner in grey trousers and no socks, covered by the long white surplice.

There is no doubt that my stay at Lancing furthered my interest in bird watching and ringing, much aided by Terry Kermode.

The area was great for birdwatching with water meadows up the Adur Valley, with plenty of Redshank, Lapwing and Yellow Wagtails nesting. We even found a Snipe in one of the fields. Coming from Suffolk I found Magpies and Carrion Crows nesting in blackberry bushes on the Downs quite new. The Downs were great for Wheatears and Stone Curlew but cultivation near Lancing was too much for them.

The Stone Curlew *Brian Metcalf*

I moved to Steyning in 1960 with my wife Hilda, having been actively birding in the country since 1947. My introduction to the Shoreham Society occurred when Tony Marr, the secretary at that time, invited me to take over the position jointly with June Smith. I was duly elected. In at the deep end it might be said. The birds of our area have altered since 1960, but not drastically. The Steyning Adur levels had a few breeding pairs of Lapwing, Redshank and Yellow Wagtails, now a memory.

The Downs had more finch flocks, Linnet, Chaffinch, amongst which could be found regular Bramblings. Raptors were good and still are. I recall Harriers and Rough-legged Buzzards.

Stone Curlew – *Brian Metcalf*

In our Newnham Lane garden we had a resident Cirl Bunting 1960-1968, now also a memory. Corn Bunting could be seen on the overhead wires along our lane with open fields beyond in which Grey Partridge were common. Those fields are now housing estates in which I have to admit we now live. We also had a few Stone Curlews, although I never

did well with that species. I recall seeing only one in Stump Bottom. We love of course our gains. The 1960 Collared Dove was a top twitch, a word never heard of in those days I am glad to say. I now see more Buzzards, Hobbies, Mediterranean Gulls, Purple Sandpiper and of course Little Egrets. On the whole I consider things have balanced out reasonably well. I am certainly glad I am living where I am.

The Most Satisfying Bird

This has to be the seven Dotterels I found with Hilda on a ploughed field on our Steyning Round Hill 1st September 1997. This is after many years of walking that hill keeping an eye open and meeting with success at long last.

A Field Outing *Dave Labdon*

Arriving for a field outing at Greatham Bridge in a blinding snowstorm and again at Pagham in pouring rain certainly stay in my mind, as well as some really lovely and worthwhile outings at various times. We all know that birders are eternal optimists and, like Mr Micawber, always waiting for some thing to turn up. I do remember one Sunday morning, having taken the dog around Hill Barn Golf Course, I called in the hospital to scrounge a cup of coffee with Lilian. On looking out of her office window, which looked out on to a grassy rectangle between the buildings, I spied what was undoubtedly a Wheatear but much larger and paler than any I had seen before. When I got home I consulted the field guide and surmised that it could just be a rarity. I tried to contact Bernie but he was working so I rang Dave Smith and arranged to meet him back at the hospital. He eventually arrived, with Richard. Fortunately the hospital was quiet that day but there were a few raised eyebrows at the spectacle of a gaggle of men in outdoor clothes wandering the corridors loaded with optical equipment which was obviously not for medical purposes. Having tried every vantage point (some definitely 'out of bounds') we had some very good views of what was obviously a very tired bird, which Dave identified as a Greenland race Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe leucorhoa*). A first for me but not likely to hit the record books!

My best garden bird is a …… *Ken Hearne*

My best garden bird is a Black Redstart which last year gave me the benefit of having a large school building at the bottom of the garden. It was attracted to the extensive flat roofs and then briefly came on to my boundary wall before being chased off by the local Robin.

There have been many changes in bird watching over the years – I can remember often seeing Red-backed Shrikes in the area of Bucks where I lived as a boy. Other aspects have not. I can recall my aunt taking me to the RSPB slide shows on birds nearly 60 years ago to encourage my natural interest in wildlife. The presentations were less professional but the message the same.

But then along came *Ken Hearne*

A garden backing onto a large secondary school and fronting a busy road does not seem a

likely place for a Sussex record. It was, therefore, a surprise to see in the back garden on November 17th 2002 a small dainty bird which I quickly identified as a Lesser Whitethroat. A check of the Sussex Ornithological Society annual reports established that the latest recorded departure date for the County for this species was 21 November 1957 at Burgess Hill. Needless to say a close watch was kept on the garden. It was an irregular visitor and after several days absence there was excitement on 23 November when it re-appeared and created a new record for the latest departure date. Little did I know at the time that there was no autumn departure date and that it was to stay in the area for nearly five months and become the first record of a Lesser Whitethroat to winter in the County.

It spent the first week searching shrubs for natural food and then showed an increasing awareness of the Greenfinches on the seed feeders. 10 days after first appearing in the garden it made an unsuccessful attempt to land on the niger feeder. Its progress in possibly learning to take seed from feeders was rudely interrupted by frequent visits to the back garden by the local male Sparrowhawk. Over the next few days it was not seen and few birds were brave enough to visit the feeders.

At the beginning of December it re-appeared in the front garden on the ground under two peanut feeders which are used by sparrows and are sited close to the house to reduce hawk predation. It readily adapted to feeding on peanut remnants but it was a week before it tried to cling on to one of the feeders. Its skill gradually improved until it pecked hard enough at the peanuts to obtain food on 24 December. It was very timid and would only visit a feeder when other birds were not there. It was at the bottom of the pecking order when feeding on the ground, and the resident Dunnock had the rare opportunity to be dominant. It proved its ability to survive adverse weather when mild conditions in December were followed by a light covering of snow in early January. The pond nearby was frozen over for several days. Strong easterly winds at this time made the temperature feel like minus 50C.

Its visits to the garden were unpredictable and sometimes several days would pass without it being seen. It did not appear to be wholly dependent on the peanuts and after feeding it could be seen flying strongly out of sight. It is not possible to say how much natural food it found or whether it visited feeders in other gardens.

Bird watchers experienced in identifying the different races of the Lesser Whitethroat came to see it but were unsuccessful. Judging from some rather less than perfect photographs I took and notes of its behaviour they took the view it was a standard first-winter bird.

It was last seen on April 14th 2003 and provided a very memorable period of garden bird watching!

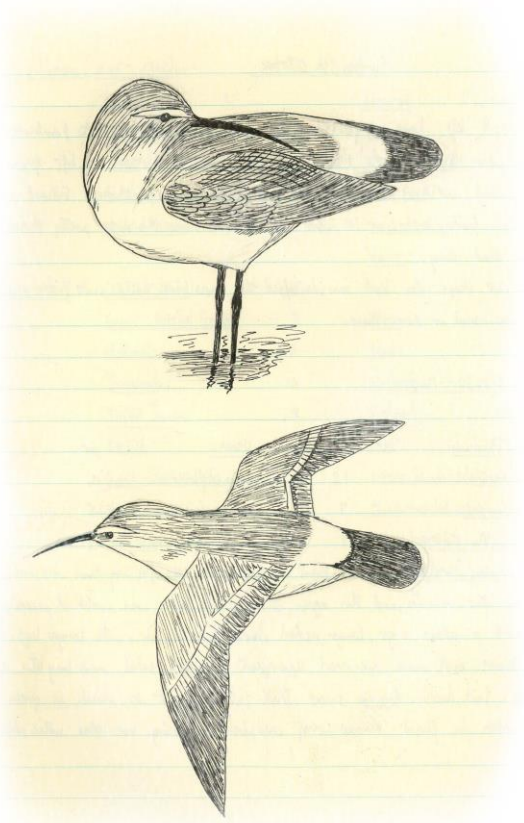
A delayed lunch *Cliff Walder*

It was a Saturday morning in April in the late 1970's when my wife called to say there was a new bird in the garden. I hastened to join her at the patio window to look for the stranger. It was sitting on the ground under a magnolia tree and, although we had never seen the species before, it was not difficult to identify as a Hawfinch. We could hardly believe our luck that one of these birds could visit our garden in the centre of Southwick. It stayed for a couple of hours and we sat there mesmerized by its presence. We had lunch at 3.30 p.m. that day and whenever I see a Hawfinch at Bedgebury or elsewhere, I never forget that the first time I saw one of these magnificent birds I had to wait until mid afternoon to sit down to lunch!

The transition *Cliff Walder*

Fifty years ago when this Society was founded I was extremely interested in things that flew. Not birds but aeroplanes. At that time I was the Chief Observer of the Shoreham Post of the Royal Observer Corps and I spent a lot of my spare time on ROC affairs. Not an aeroplane overflew without it being identified and, when we were on exercise, reported to our Centre at Horsham. In the 1960's more of the ROC's activities were devoted to the reporting of Nuclear fall out and our Posts were transferred from above ground to underground so my enthusiasm for the Corps waned but my interest in things that flew continued.

My wife was a bird watcher and with retirement ahead we began to think of what we could do together in the years to come. We had seen too many friends drift apart because one of the partners had become a golf fanatic and although we both enjoyed dinghy sailing we thought that it would be too strenuous as we aged. It was obvious, therefore, that I should make the transition from aeroplanes to birds and join in my wife's hobby. We joined the RSPB and went together on bird watching holidays to Spain, Tanzania, Turkey, Canada and New Zealand. All were most enjoyable. Unfortunately my wife passed away in 1988 but her enthusiasm for birds remained with me and I am thankful that I made the transition from aeroplanes to birds. However, I must admit that not an aeroplane passes overhead without a glance from me, after all they are so much easier to identify than LBJs.



Curlew Sandpiper – *Alan Kitson*

Notes from ARK 1962 *Alan Kitson*

The following records from Alan Kitson's 1962 diary show, even at the age of 15 years, how commonplace it was to hitch-hike anywhere to see birds and the importance of making detailed notes of sightings. All the other people mentioned were well-known in Sussex and several have become renowned in the world of ornithology.

Alan Kitson at the Severals in 1963 – *Alan Kitson*

April 13th Ring Ouzle

2 male + female on rough, stony ground under Pagham-Sidlesham Ferry. On ground most of time, but male did perch on a bush once. Both were much bigger than blackbird with light brown wings. Male was black all over, with, (of course) the white crescent on upper breast. Female much browner, & her crescent wasn't so white, & mingled in more with brown. Anxiety note – a short harsh "chak, chak."

Saturday 28th September - Selsey.

After a poor nights sleep c. 4 hrs. in all – we got up at 04.45 and went out to await the arrival of the Shoreham Society. They soon arrived – c. 15 only….Most of the day the area was covered at the Bill tip, where the birds appeared to be. After fabulous views of a Firecrest I went and found the bird – an imm. Barred Warbler. This stayed all day and was seen by everyone – even the Shoreham mob……In evening wind started to get up and eventually reached force 5 with heavy rain during night…….. It was one big laugh during the night – five of us had to kip in hut and the rain was soaking through the hut walls and the wind was howling.

Barred Warbler

One found in thick brambles, feeding on berries, near the Bill House. The bird was found by ARK, who after watching it for only c. 2 secs. dashed over to other observers including MJH (Mike Helps) and RFP (Richard Porter) – reporting a "huge" warbler, rather shrike-like in appearance. The bird was soon located and subsequently identified as an immature

Barred Warbler. BAEM (Tony Marr) was called over and we all (+ 15 Shoreham Society members) had excellent views of this truly remarkable bird down to c. 10 yds. with 10 x glasses.
General: A large, greyish warbler, rather shrike-like in jizz, but also resembling a huge Lesser Whitethroat with a huge tail & bill. (Size of nearby sparrows, but completely different shape) with a long tail,often fanned out. Bill thick and heavy. Forehead feathers were strongly raised at first but were usually held flat.

Barred Warbler – *Alan Kitson*

Upperparts. Grey with brown wash on ' wing panel' was noticeable, formed by the pale edges to inner primaries and outer secondaries. Also slight pale tips to greater & median wing coverts. The grey from the lores gradually merged into the breast above carpal joint. Underparts off-white, perhaps paler on lower breast. Undertail coverts barred, numerous pale grey bars. Flanks also, but more indistinctly and with fewer bars. Tail same colour as mantle with off-white tips to outers. Bill pale. Eye dark (black?), legs dull brown-grey.
Habits: Rather a clumsy bird, with slow movements. Flight heavy and undulating with deep wing-beats. It was a very active bird, often hopping about on the top of brambles oblivious of all the observers around it, when not in evidence it was presumed to be skulking.

Saturday 13th October – Selsey (06.15 onwards)
Dad took me up to Seven Dials, and I began hitch-hiking at 04.50 I soon got a fair lift in a lorry to Toll Bridge from here I had no difficulty in getting to Chi(chester), and I soon got a lift down to Selsey – in David Langford's car.

Chris Mead at Selsey 1964 – *Ian Willis*

Most of the a.m. was taken up with visible migration watching and nice numbers of finches, pipits, larks etc. were on the move. Sandy (Roy Sandison) arrived at c.07.30 and at about 1000 took BAEM (Tony Marr), CJM (Chris Mead) and me up to the Severals. Mead slept most of the time, and Sandy had to leave at 11.30. On producing very little we started back for Selsey when BAEM spotted a Skua – a fine bird flying c. 30 yards up above his and my heads. The walk back was dull and boring until Chris volunteered to buy us a drink at the pub. Back at the B/T, after Tony had washed down 6 pints of lager, we continued to sea-watch while Tony kipped. In the evening Mike Shrubb came down and we viewed CJM's slides, together. Tony was really fagged out after writing the log so we bedded down at 21.20. I had to use Mike Jennings' rough sleeping bag. NB I had not meant to stay at Selsey this weekend, so had no kit and had to ring Dad up.

Bino-peculiars *Shena Maskell*

When my father died, the three items the family could not part with were his deerstalker, his walking stick and his military binoculars. Although we bought him a lightweight pair for his 70th birthday, he continued to use his heavyweights, latterly wielding them as a monocular, using the tube with graticules as a handle. These were the binoculars of my childhood. Having been designed for wartime naval use, the light-gathering power of these 'Binoprisms' was tremendous. They were never slippy or wet because of their vermiculated coating, with an appearance of metallic astrakhan. However, the price to pay was weight. My father would steady himself on a fencepost or my mother's shoulder! As a child I was lifted up to look through them in the manner one would use a telescope today. How did he put up with those vertical stripes?

On family outings it would be 'pass the field-glasses', never 'the bins'. They were much used in our overseas postings to Cyprus, Germany, the Canal Zone and the Far East. In Singapore we bought our first telescope, which afforded us great views of the Smyrna Kingfisher, as well as the strip-show on the Ambassador Hotel roof garden opposite! It seems incredible now that a family could share one pair of binoculars. Economy demanded that John and I share a pair, in the first year of marriage. Divorce nearly ensued when he dropped my Zeiss 8x30s on Leeds station, looking at the 'Flying Scotsman'. He bought some 10x50s, which again were too heavy for me to use without a fencepost! Next came years of prosperity. Teachers had a pay rise so we bought matching 10x42 Opticrons, still used often. At the Millennium, we backpacked around the world and became, of necessity, minimalists. My mother's travel gift was a pair of Opticron Sequoia 7x21s. I use them daily as they fit my hand perfectly. What I lose in magnification, I gain in lack of shake! Perversely, when most birders move upmarket, I have moved down. However, we do now have eight pairs of binoculars in the family, including my father's heirloom!

The hedge *Enid Chadwell*

In the late 1960's we had a Macrocarpa hedge down one side of the garden and one year, for several weeks in early summer, a tawny owl was resident there and always seemed to wake up and call 'tu-whit-tu-whoo' at 4.30 every afternoon. A sound I have not heard here for many years, the last time was July 1982.

In November 1995 we had a cock pheasant in the garden, which was a surprise for the centre of Hove!

When you see the large numbers of Brent Geese in Chichester Harbour today, it is hard to believe that 40 years ago if you wanted a near view you had to keep below any bank and peer over so they did not all immediately fly off!

Extracts from a letter of reminiscences *Dot Ranger*

Dot Ranger of Hove, now 86 years, a member with her husband in the early 1960's.

…in the last three years I have not heard a Cuckoo. That's the first time in my life.

I do remember one year that one evening House Martins collected on my house and next door. They were clinging everywhere. The next morning they had all gone. My neighbour heard something behind the gas fire. The gas man came and it was one that had come down the chimney. It was unhurt and he released it, and I wondered if it caught up with the others.

I can remember seeing a Cattle Egret somewhere and also a good view of a Sora Rail.

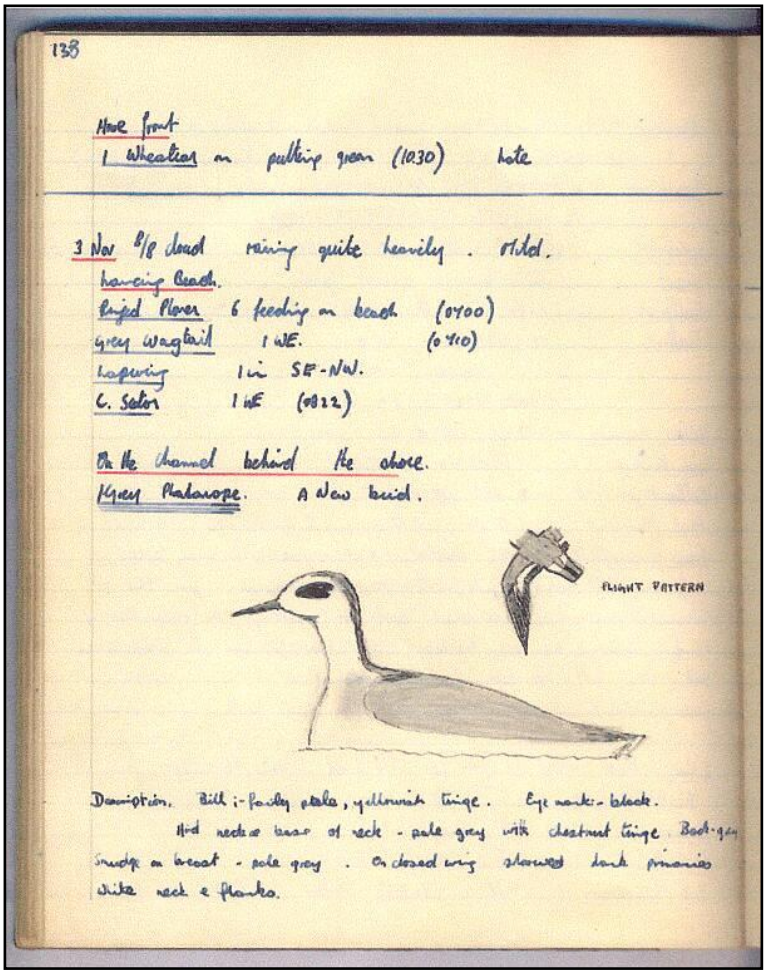
I remember when we got excited when Collared Doves first came to the county. Bramblings, Bullfinches, various Buntings, Crossbills, Hawfinch, Flycatchers, Shrikes, Siskin, Tree Sparrow and quite a few others were commonly seen but not these days. I hardly ever see a Song Thrush in the garden, nor Missel Thrush now!

A practical use for birding! *Diane Hicks*

Knowing your birds can come in very useful, especially when your young off-spring, namely Simon, is around.
One day whilst backing out of my understairs cupboard, which has a very low frame, I hit my head and the first words to come rushing out were "**b####y h##l** !!"
Simon's response to this was "mummy did you say Baby Owl." "Yes dear" I calmly replied. Needless to say this has remained a standing joke and expression in our house to this day.

The influence that Shoreham has had *Richard Porter*

Memories of Shoreham by the Sea and the considerable influence that Shoreham and its environs have had on me over the years. Whilst my first bird notes were made in London in May 1953, the year your Society started, it was five years later that, as a 15 year-old, I made my first visit to Shoreham, indeed to Sussex.



A page from Richard Porter's log book

On 18 October 1958, accompanied by a more senior, and certainly much taller, Tony Marr, I saw my first Iceland Gull on the River Adur. Later, I joined a Shoreham Society outing and was rewarded with a Spotted Redshank near the river mouth. Amongst the seven members I can remember Tom Palmer. A delight to be with, someone who really enjoyed their birds …'Richard, if you've seen an Oystercatcher and Shelduck you've had a good day'. At night Tony and I were joined by Mike Jennings for a wader mist-netting session on the mudflats, catching two Redshank and a Dunlin.

My second visit was a year later, in November 1959. I spent the early morning seawatching off Lancing Beach and later found a Grey Phalarope on Widewater. It was, of course, at this time - 1959 - that three S&DOS members (Tony Marr, Mike Jennings and Tony Sheldon) started the Selsey Bill Bird Observatory, which soon became nationally famous. I used to hitch-hike down to Selsey after school from my home in North London practically every weekend for much of the spring and autumn from 1960 to 62 after which it was travel by motorbike.

Many of the people gathering then at the Bill, either at weekends or school or college holidays were from your area: Mike Helps, Ian Willis, Alan Kitson, Chris Mead and Roger Wilmshurst to name a few. And many went on to join the ranks of the ornithological establishment.

Although I continued to live and study in London I regularly stayed at Southwick with Tony Marr and his mother at 59 The Green which became the centre of Sussex ornithological scheming and action. The Sussex Ornithological Society was hatched there, the Selsey reports were diligently produced on an old fashioned Gestetner. And it was where Mike Helps, Ian Willis, Alan Kitson and I planned our year in Turkey in 1966 to study the breeding birds of the western Turkish lakes and the autumn raptor migration over the Bosphorus. We saved for over two years then packed up work and took the Orient Express to Istanbul on a cold April morning. I can remember going into Brighton Railway Station and asking for a single to Istanbul.

The whole trip (which turned out to be from April to December) cost less than £160 and we were one of the first groups of birders to pack up work to go off birding abroad. I can remember coming to talk to the SDOS about it.

We continued to visit Turkey for the next two years (for spells of up to three months) and then, in late 1967 several things happened that changed my life. I was offered a job in Turkey with the Turkish National Parks Department helping them with surveys and conservation, and at the same time the RSPB offered to 'train' me. Up until then I had no formal background in conservation practice or philosophy. The other thing that happened was that we started the Ornithological Society of Turkey (in 1967).

Stone Curlew – *Alan Kitson*

Richard Porter and Alan Kitson in December 1968

I was secretary and Alan Kitson with help from Ian Willis edited and produced the OST Newsletters in Southwick. The OST grew into the Ornithological Society of the Middle East which was the father of the regional bird clubs. It was in Southwick that Ian Willis and myself planned and wrote much of *Flight Identification of European Raptors*. Sadly, after our second book we fell out and lost contact. Yet in the 60s and 70s we were bosom pals and did everything together. After Turkey and five years at Sandy I returned to Southwick in 1974 when we set up the RSPB South East England Office, choosing a barn of a room in Abinger House, Portslade to operate from. We had a team of four and our first secretary, Gill Marriott, lived in Shoreham. I interviewed her in Mrs Marr's sitting room at 59 The Green. Later we moved the office to Shoreham, to Scan House, Church Street (I think it was the name that decided me) and it stayed there for several years. I can remember some fierce arguments at the RSPB HQ in Sandy when I said I wanted the office to be in the Brighton/Shoreham area. Most of the senior staff, including director Peter Conder, were in favour of it being in Redhill on the grounds of it being central for the five counties and south London. However I was keen on somewhere close to the sea and the Downs as well as having easy access from London, but in reality I probably just wanted to be in a good birding spot. Anyway we ended up first in Portslade and then Shoreham.

Most mornings before work in spring and autumn I spent seawatching off Shoreham beach or wader-watching on the Adur. Arriving at the office with a flock or two of Pom Skuas under your belt did wonders for the work ethic. Weekends were mostly spent at Beachy Head. I was also fortunate to get RSPB backing to take time off to do my degree in Ecology, my dissertation being on the feeding ecology of waders on the Adur Estuary. At the time we started the RSPB office, I got to know one of the great S&DOS stalwarts, Joseph Twort. He was then in his mid 80s, virtually blind and living in a Southwick nursing home. Once a week I used to visit him after work and for many an hour I listened to his reminiscences about 'the old days'. A treasured possession is the four books of his poems he gave me, written after his sight failed. They took you back in time through the eyes of a dying man who had such fond memories of Sussex and its wildlife. Some are reproduced in this book.

Little Egret on the River Adur – *Keith Noble*

I left Shoreham in 1980 to start the RSPB Species Protection Department at Sandy. I missed the South Coast tremendously and would come down regularly 'in season' to sea watch, often from Brighton or Southwick. I remember in 1983 seeing a Little Egret flying up Channel off Portslade and having to send in a description to the Rarities Committee. Now there are regular sightings.

In the mid 1990s Gill Marriott retired and we had a surprise leaving party at Pulborough. All the usual suspects were there and it got me thinking back to those who passed through the South East England Office. With me when we started it up was Peter Martin who is now in charge of education with WWF. Of the future Regional Officers, Tony Prater, wader expert par-excellence went to East Anglia, Andy Bunten headed up the North East Office and Mike Clark became an RSPB director. I rarely come down to Sussex now as my

home is in North Norfolk and much of my professional conservation time is devoted to Arab lands. In England most of my birding is on Blakeney Point. Last year I walked out there 123 times and had one of my best years ever in terms of what I found or saw. Far better for birds than any year I ever had in Sussex. Yet despite all, a brass band playing 'Sussex by the Sea' or hearing of May flocks of Poms migrating up the Channel will always arouse my emotions and race me back with love and affection to my days at Shoreham, Selsey Bill, Beachy Head or the South Downs. My heart may now be in Norfolk but my soul is still in Sussex.

Short quotes introducing Tony Marr

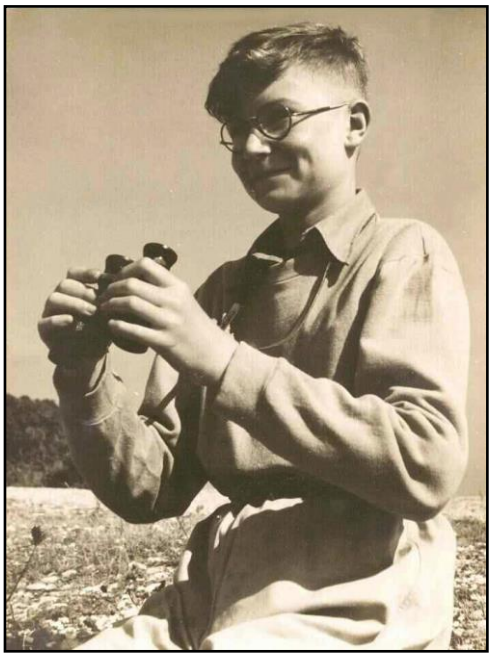
An article in The Steyning Grammar School Magazine for 1953/4 when Tony was 13/14 years old, under the heading *Bird Protection and Natural History Society* says, "At school, during the lunch hours, we have had several shows of film strips dealing with birds. Marr has proved himself an admirable and authoritative narrator." Little could that writer have known that Tony Marr would travel the world leading expeditions and lecturing on birds fifty years later.

A quote from the SOS fourth Annual Report for the year 1956 states: "We should like to congratulate Mr. Tony Marr on winning the RSPB Junior Ornithological Prize for the second successive year. Mr. Marr is one of our keenest observers and his notes have been of great value in some of the items of this Report." In fact Tony went on to win the Prize again in 1957 after which the RSPB decided someone else ought to be given a chance, or maybe Tony was just too old at 17!

From Pagham Harbour to Denzil Harber *Tony Marr*

Reading Mark Cocker's *Birders - Tales of a Tribe* (see Review in *Brit. Birds* 94: 447, September 2001), in which he has so ably and affectionately recorded for posterity the entertaining stories and heroic legends about his experiences as a young birder, mostly in Norfolk, I was reminded of my own formative years as a 'birdwatcher' growing up on the Sussex coast in the 1950s and 1960s. Hotspots like Pagham and Chichester Harbours and Selsey Bill were my regular haunts. Above all, there were the characters and personalities who made it all such fun - for most of the time, anyway. Some of the stories about these unusual people ought to be recorded before they are lost for ever, and with them much of the early colour and passion of our obsessive hobby.

From the high-tech, fast-moving birding world of 2002, it's very difficult now to appreciate just how basic and low-key was the birdwatching scene of 50 years ago. The pursuit itself was regarded as highly eccentric and open to ridicule. 'Oh, you watch birds, do you? The sort with two legs, I suppose, ha ha!' was the usual gibe. Walking about with binoculars, you were regarded as either a nutter or a peeping tom.



Tony Marr at Pagham Harbour when he was 13

Few birdwatchers had telephones and even fewer had cars. Consequently bird news passed around very slowly, and, incredible as it now seems, usually by letter or postcard. I remember receiving a letter in October 1957 from a friend who lived only four miles away, telling me that he had seen a Pectoral Sandpiper at Pagham Harbour the previous Sunday, and that if I were to go there the following weekend, I might be lucky enough to see it. Amazingly, I did. Most birdwatchers travelled by train and bus, which were reliable and punctual in those days.

Most of us learned our craft from *The Observer's Book of British Birds,* fortuitously published in a new edition in 1952 when I first consciously started watching birds. In the same year, Phil Hollom published his *Popular Handbook of British Birds*, based on Witherby's *Handbook* which schoolboys could not afford, and opened our youthful eyes to the wonders of field identification and the skills and knowledge needed to practise it.

Travel abroad was prohibitively costly and therefore out of reach of most people. Before 1954, when the legendary 'Peterson' *Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe* was published, we knew virtually nothing about birds beyond our shores, other than the occasional article about 'foreign' species in *BB.*

Binoculars were heavy and expensive, mostly ex-wartime models, used mainly by coastguards and racegoers. Telescopes were cumbersome three-draw 'brass and glass' naval implements which no-one had thought of mounting on a tripod. Cameras and telephoto lenses were impossibly expensive, and fairly primitive.

These were pioneering days, when it was unusual to meet another birdwatcher, most of whom were self-taught. The RSPB and BTO were small. There were few county ornithological societies, just a few local natural history societies and even fewer local bird clubs. An 'expert', which usually meant anyone with a telescope who could separate a Sanderling from a Dunlin, was held in awe, and we avidly read about the legendary exploits and achievements of the great bird men of the past.

There had been a number of these in my home county of Sussex, which has a well-documented ornithological history traceable as far back as 1752. Many of the early ornithologists were men of private means with time on their hands to pursue their interest, or clergymen or doctors, and some of them were highly eccentric. John, or Jock, Walpole-Bond was among the great characters, an inveterate egg-collector who even described himself as 'an honest rogue'. He will be remembered above all for his monumental three-volume *A History of Sussex Birds* (1938), the culmination of over thirty years of nest-finding and egg-collecting which provided him with an outstanding knowledge of British birds, as acknowledged in his obituary in *Brit. Birds* 51: 237-239 (June 1958).

Walpole-Bond was possibly Sussex's finest ever field ornithologist, who found more nests than anyone is ever likely to again. He 'examined' well over two hundred nests of Grasshopper Warbler, for example. He clearly had a great affection for birds like the Woodlark and the Cirl Bunting, despite looting their nests. He wrote eloquently about what he saw, as of a Raven family which 'together all leave home at dawn, together all return with eve, a straggling line of croaking animation'. He went out into the field dressed like a tramp, to such effect that he boasted that twice he had been offered his fare on a bus by a kind-hearted old lady, and on one notable occasion he was tipped a florin by a dear old girl and told to buy himself a square meal.

I was not fortunate enough to meet Walpole-Bond, but I did encounter another Sussex character whose personality and exploits were equally larger than life, just as I was learning about birds when living near Brighton. This was Denzil Dean Harber, who was our county bird recorder, and to whom, rather hesitantly, I first submitted my county records in 1954 as a rather timid schoolboy. As the sole editor of *The Sussex Bird Report* for six years, he acquired a certain reputation as a tyrant who wielded the editorial red pen with obvious relish and great severity. His frequent rejection, or pointed omission, of records was a source of friction with many observers, and several suggested that he accepted only his own. This was an era when success and acceptance as a good birdwatcher was judged by the number of times your initials appeared in the annual report, and it was always liberally sprinkled with DDH's. He himself wrote of being 'in charge of bird records for the county', and it felt like it.

I quickly learned to recognise his erratic typing on postcards and letters, always starting 'Dear Marr', and realised that he set high standards. He challenged a record I submitted of 428 Skylarks arriving from the sea one day in October 1955 by suggesting that they were Starlings, and published the record under Skylark as 'some coming in...' To Bob Scott, who wrote to report some Twite at Beachy Head one September, DDH (as he was

affectionately known by most) replied to say that Twite had never been recorded in Sussex in September, although he had seen some himself.

Left to right Mike Nolan (Beachy Head Group) Tony Marr, Julian Harber and Denzil Harber at Selsey in 1960. - *Tony Marr*

He described a paper on diver flight identification written by Richard Porter as 'largely nonsense'. He wrote to an observer who claimed to have seen a Snow Finch at Newhaven to tell him that 'it was of course a Snow Bunting, you bloody fool'. The Report enjoyed a good reputation, as it appeared promptly and because most contributors realised that it was better perhaps to exclude a few genuine records than to include any doubtful ones. The relationship between Harber and contributors to 'his' bird report was definitely that of headmaster and pupils - many of them recalcitrant and out of order as he saw it, and needing education and enlightenment. He clearly regarded birdwatching and birdwatchers as a source of great entertainment, and he certainly livened it up. His presence at a 'twitch', as it would now be called, was both welcomed and feared, as his outspoken comments about other observers, although hilarious to some, were regarded as cutting and outrageous by others, particularly those on the receiving end.

Some observers from Portsmouth, from a group calling themselves 'The PG' (birdwatching friends who were regularly in the field together at Langstone Harbour and Farlington Marshes), paid a visit to Harber's regular sea-watching haunt at Langney Point, near Eastbourne, one September, where they saw a Long-tailed Duck. They wrote to tell him of their sighting, to which he replied that it was only 'an aberrant female Common

Scoter'. They then submitted a full description, to which he replied that he considered the correspondence terminated. Their response was to post him a brown paper parcel containing a pair of plastic binoculars purchased in Woolworth's, accompanied by an anonymous note suggesting that he would see better if he used those! He quickly discovered their origin when he noticed that they were wrapped in a copy of the *Portsmouth Evening News*.....

On the international scene, a unique achievement of Harber's was his 40-page review in *BB* between May and November 1955 of the six volumes of Dementiev's and Gladkov's *The Birds of the Soviet Union.* This was an epic task, involving translation from Russian, in which DDH was fluent, and one which he tackled with his customary zest and energy.

His obituary in *Brit. Birds* 60: 84-86 (February 1967) paid tribute also to his work as a founder member of BBRC in 1958, and his period as its Secretary from 1963 until his untimely death in 1966. He clearly relished this role, entering into prompt and incisive correspondence with those who either approached him for advice, or complained about the rejection of their rarity records. He wrote to Alan Kitson, who had asked for BBRC's help in confirming the identification of an odd raptor, to suggest that 'There is no point in sending the raptor to my Committee. It sounds very like a Buzzard to me'. Alan also asked whether a strange Wheatear he had seen might have been a Pied, to which DDH responded by writing that 'such cases usually arise as a result of abnormal (e.g. albinistic) plumage or of defective observation'. He wrote to John Cox (of Cox's Sandpiper fame), who had complained about the rejection of (ironically) a Pectoral Sandpiper, to thank him for his 'childish letter'.

These two-worders became legendary. He coined the phrase 'mass hallucinations', to describe the phenomenon of observers uncritically accepting identifications made by others which subsequently proved to be incorrect, in a letter to *BB* headed 'The original misidentification of the Hampshire Cetti's Warbler' (*Br. Birds* 58: 225-227, June 1965). And when I had the temerity to submit a pithy observation on what I considered to be an unnecessarily lofty criticism by DDH of the observers (*Br. Birds* 58: 518, December 1965) I was subsequently rebuked by DDH for my 'schoolboy irony'! (*Br. Birds* 59: 204-205, May 1966).

Denzil Harber was an eccentric in the ornithological world, unconventional and non-conforming, who did not suffer fools gladly, but who was determinedly logical. Time, ornithology, and BBRC have all moved on since then, but the world is a duller place without such colourful characters.

Acknowledgements: This article has been printed in British Birds March 2003 Vol. 96 No. 3 and I am grateful to the Sussex Ornithological Society for allowing me to quote from *Birds of Sussex* (SOS 1996), *Birds in Sussex 1962-1987*, and from Society newsletters.

The binoculars I started with *Roy Sandison*

The binoculars I started with cost £4.00 second-hand. I then graduated to the monstrous, ex-U-Boat, fixed focus weighing about 5lbs., obtained from a Mr. Bell, Jeweller in

Shoreham in the 1950's I think 7x or 8x at 42/50, ideal now 10x are very dark. I once had a Ross Admiralty 2- draw scope of good clarity but have since joined the Kowa- Opticron set!

The old Witherby 5-set Handbook still suffices, plus the Collins Field Guide. These cost me £7 for the 5 volumes (new) and Mason and Hodges of West Worthing let me pay off at 24/- per month! I started collecting the Birds of the Western Palearctic volumes but sold them at the 5th one, price too expensive and content too indigestible! I like the Poyser and Croom-Helm specialist books.

We had some good family holidays in Gibraltar when our family were teaching out there and the greatest high-light was seeing 900+ Honey Buzzards in four hours crossing from North Africa.

Goldcrest Salthouse, Norfolk *Roy Sandison*

On the 12th October 1976 while sheltering from the stiff north-easterly in the lee of sand dunes, a few tiny specks appeared low over the tide's edge and soon developed into "crests". One detached itself from the loose formation and alighted on a piece of driftwood at my feet. Pausing for breath, the ragged bundle flew on to my boot, pausing again, then proceeded onto my knee as I sat hunched. The final move was on to my gloved hand which I enclosed gently with my other glove and so was able to transfer this North Sea wanderer to the warmth of our car. After a few minutes warm-up my wife released the bird which was soon actively pursuing insects over a nearby pool.

Goldcrest - *John Reaney*

To highlight the exotic *Roy Sandison*

I suppose it is only natural when looking back over one's birdwatching activities to highlight the exotic and unusual occasions. For me, in the SDOS area, a few examples are memorable; such as immature Red-footed Falcon (Cissbury 1979), Black Kite (Washington Bostal 1980), Sociable Plover (Adur Valley 1985) and Great Spotted Cuckoo (Sussex Pad 1990). The Sociable Plover proved anything but sociable and I estimate that 25 and a half hours were expended before tracking this bird down on the airfield. The Great Spotted Cuckoo became a hazard to life and limb as the crossing on foot of the A27 at the Sussex Pad was negotiated. There are, however, sightings of birds of a more mundane nature that have given much pleasure and satisfaction and I append two such occasions from a small article printed in the SOS Newletter but, being within the SDOS area, seem to justify inclusion here. Albeit with respect to that august body. Buzzard: Harrow Hill, Patching, West Sussex 3rd September 1972 Observing a common Buzzard hanging on the north east wind over the crest of Harrow Hill, I was surprised when this portly bird suddenly tipped on to its right wing and completed a full barrel roll through 360 degrees with legs fully extended. Perhaps not quite satisfied with its performance the raptor then executed a second perfect roll about twenty feet above the ground and without losing any height. The buzzard then resumed patrolling. An awkward cross-wind perhaps or simply joie- de-vivre? I favour the latter.

Hen Harrier – *John Reaney*

Hen Harrier: No-man's Land, Cissbury 11th May 1969 In the better days, ornithologically speaking, of land management between 1960 and 1970, Hen Harriers became relatively commonplace on the Downs with birds arriving in late September and staying as late as 31st May, their principal hunting grounds consisting of stubble, leys and bean and clover

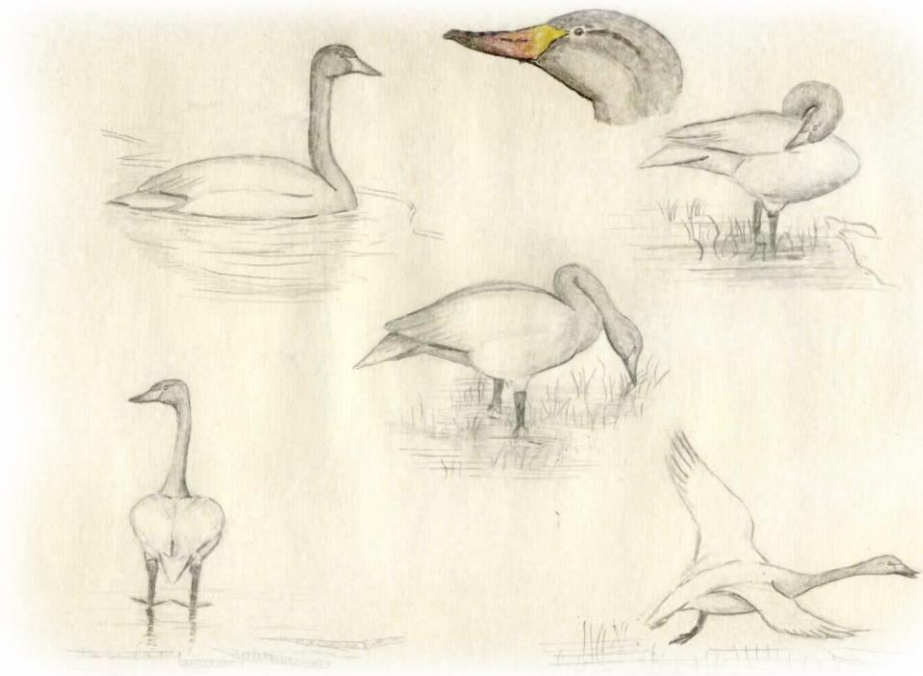
fields. On this day a tractor was trundling through Stump Bottom driven by the late Robert Largen, a keeper on the Goring Estate and a fine self-taught naturalist. As I watched his progress from a hillside, a splendid male Hen Harrier working the rough ground behind him lifted from the ground and alighted gently on the cab top of the tractor and stole a ride for some 250 yards 'alighting' when the driver stopped. I mentioned this to Robert later who, although unaware of his passenger that day, had quite often seen this particular bird working very closely around him during the winter months, whilst two other harriers tended to patrol their own patches. My first sighting of any significance in our area occurred on 5th March 1951 when I surprised a Common Buzzard perched on a telephone pole at Cuckoo Comer. Little did I expect that 50 years hence the Buzzard would become reasonably 'common' but that sadly such endearing birds, abundant then, as Tree Sparrow, Cirl Bunting and even Stone Curlew would become virtually absent from our area.

Forays with Forbes *John Maskell*

One of the great advantages of SDOS membership is the excellent series of field outings organised by the Society throughout the year. During my 20 years membership my field craft has been much improved thanks to the tuition from the Society's many talented leaders. I have learnt a wealth of knowledge from all and to them I am eternally grateful. If asked to choose my two most memorable excursions it is perhaps significant that Bernie Forbes led them both. The numerous outings he has commanded have always been noted for their sound sightings (no stringing!) and impish humour. Avian dots on the horizon rarely escape his eagle eyes. With Bernie at the helm one can tick with confidence. The excursion of 11th January 1987 was to Waltham Brooks. It was a very cold day with a heavy gray sky. Indeed back home in Worthing my garden thermometer recorded a maximum of -4.5 C (24 F). We met at 10 a.m. but, the conditions being so severe, by 2 p.m. it was time to adjourn.

Barnacle Geese - *Roger Wilsmhurst*

From 11:15 until noon there was a heavy fall of snow so we took refuge in a derelict barn overlooking the Brooks. (Several years later the RSPB turned this into their visitor centre.) Whilst we waited for the severe weather to abate, Bernie entertained us by examining the contents of various Barn Owl pellets that were strewn about the floor. From the vantage point of the barn we viewed a magical sight as skeins containing hundreds of geese circled and then flew in to land. That vision is still etched in my mind. Greylag, Barnacle and Canada Geese were all seen that day. After midday the skies cleared and we were able to leave the warmth and shelter of the barn. By the end of the day I had recorded 45 species and had seen Bewick's Swan and Gadwall for the first time.



Whooper Swans 1956 – *Roger Wilmshurst*

Many years and much banter later saw Bernie leading one of his New Forest walks. These have become a popular annual fixture and have afforded the opportunity to tick a variety of woodland species and summer immigrants. The summer of 2002 was not noted for its seasonal weather and the 26th May dawned gray and overcast. A different venue for 2002 saw a dozen members gathering at Cadmans Pool for a 9.30 a.m. kick-off. Within a quarter of an hour of setting out we had to leap a stream in full flood and the first of us gained wet feet!

The skies remained leaden throughout the morning but just before 11 a.m. the day brightened with the sight of two Honey Buzzards some half a mile to the west. After several abortive visits to the Forest and Norfolk I could finally tick a new British species. The day warmed up and a variety of midges came out to enjoy a late breakfast of SDOS flesh! Comment was made on Bernie's knowledge of the New Forest's paths. "Oh yes, I've been coming here for years. I could probably find my way out if you dropped me

anywhere in the Forest," was the gist of our leader's confident reply. Little did he realise .... We logged the usual summer woodland species including Wood Warbler. Then one of Bernie's distant dots materialised into a Peregrine. After such a feast we picnicked in brief midday sunshine. However, during the afternoon the weather deteriorated into heavy and persistent rain. Much to everyone's surprise a Little Egret flew past. We sheltered under some venerable oaks. The rain eased and we began stepping it out again. Half an hour later, as we began to discard our anoraks, we found ourselves admiring a view we'd enjoyed three hours before when following the Peregrine! Bernie had to admit that his Ordnance Survey knowledge had temporarily evaporated. Then just when the SDOS party might have mutinied a Honey Buzzard flew right overhead and all were pacified. As we reoriented ourselves back to Fritham we again had to ford a raging stream. Progressive businesses pay many thousands of pounds for the team building exercise that followed. Under the leadership of Captain Forbes the SDOS commandos searched for fallen trees to construct a temporary bridge. Then linking hands we managed to get everyone safely across. It was a real bonding experience and when we eventually returned to our cars it wasn't the birds that were foremost in our minds. We all had wet feet! Yes, a Bernie-led walk is a guaranteed multi-sensory experience and one not to be missed!

There were two ladies sitting… *John Ford*

A little story on some light hearted moments of bird watching. Many years ago I was at Pagham, near Church Norton. There were two ladies sitting on a low wall nearby. A few yards in front were two men, binoculars raised searching the sky as one does. I was a little further to one side, also reviewing the general scene. Suddenly there was a plaintive cry from one of the two ladies. "Help I'm falling", she called out. Her arms started to circle backwards. she called again, "help I'm falling!" At that moment one of the men exclaimed, "Good heavens a Black Tern". Alas the lady reached terra firma with legs sticking up above the wall, without masculine help being offered. I seem to remember her friend pulled her up again. She was most indignant. Some time later I was behind them shuffling along a path. "Him and his Black Tern", she said, "he didn't even look round!" I always think of this whenever I see a picture of a Black Tern!

The shooting party *John Ford*

We were quite a big party of ramblers walking along a track near Lodsworth one day in mid summer. It had been a fine day and the corn was gathered in. As we approached a short section of stubble with a lot of straw strewn around we encountered a shooting party. The leader approached us and said quite politely "Would you mind waiting a couple of minutes please to let the guns through?" We waited while the party of beaters, gun bearers and dogs passed across the stubble in front of us. When they had gone he thanked us and continued on his way.

We set off across the stubble, at right angles to where the shooting party had crossed. We were half way across, when to our amazement a female pheasant got up alongside of us from under the straw! She eyed us up and down and without any sign of concern, strolled gently away across the field.

I am sure she had decided "only ramblers, they don't carry guns" and did not show any sign of panic. How the shooting party did not tread on her I will never know.

The photograph of this male Pheasant was taken at Wakehurst in spring when the bluebells were out. The picture was entered several years ago in the BBC's Wildlife competition, the bird behaviour section, where it won a £1000 for capturing the Pheasant's whirring wings – *Roger Wilmshurst*

Tea tray wedding present *John Ford*

When we married, a very long time ago, somebody gave us a tea tray as a wedding present. It had a picture of a bird on it with a very strange tail. We were not very much into bird watching in those days so never gave a thought as to what it was, or even if it was a bird from foreign parts.

We subsequently went on holiday one summer to Keld, at the top of Swaledale in Yorkshire. One evening we were slowly driving back down West Stonesdale, enjoying the evening sunlight when this large black bird walked out of the undergrowth into the middle of the road a few yards in front of us. We stopped. It stretched itself up to its full height and spread out its magnificent lyre tail behind it. "Good heavens", I said to my wife, "its the bird on our tea tray".

It was of course a Black Grouse. It stayed there for some minutes, we just sat there enjoying the sight of it. It was a good job we did, because we have never had such a good view of one since.

Early influences on a local birder *Graham Smith*

I was about eight years old when a Christmas 'extra' turned out to be a thin hardback, with mid- to light-grey illustrations, entitled "What's that Bird?" I remember nothing of the contents, but I can still see the cover, which featured a splendid male Great-crested Grebe. That photograph sowed a seed which germinated, though the plant took decades to grow!

A year or so later, after a visit to Shoreham Library, then in New Road, I came away with "The Blue Feather Club" whose author I regretfully do not recall. This author stirred my imagination far more deeply, though he did not provoke me into actual action.

It was the story of two children, a boy and a girl, perhaps brother and sister - a typical Janet and John, who come across an adult friend called (Oh dear!) Uncle Nuts, because he was so deeply tanned by his outdoor life (and quite unpolitically-correct in our sad and defensive age) who introduces them to birds. Each chapter dealt with a different habitat, so that I became spellbound by the names and early-jizz-stirrings of Kittiwakes and Razorbills, Tree-creepers and Nuthatches, Herons and Oystercatchers, without ever considering that I might come their way.

But the best aspect of the book was the idea of the blue feathers. Uncle Nuts told the children that you could not be a true birdwatcher until you had discovered for yourself the blue wing-feathers of a Jay! I never forgot this, and eventually found mine in Sherwood Forest, some time in the 80's when I was past 50, and those feathers still reside in the pages of the old Readers' Digest British Birds here at home.

The third influence came from Steyning Grammar School. In my second and third year there (before I was forced to drop Biology because I was good at Latin), we had a teacher of that subject called John Moore. He was young and, for those days, what we now call laid-back. At any rate, we were very well-behaved, and he was able to take us out in the

Spring and Summer, walking around the hills and streams of Steyning, amiably pointing things out - not just birds. I remember a Green Hairstreak butterfly to this day - I don't know how many of us took the walks seriously, but I do know that lifelong enthusiasts, Tony Marr, Roger Ruston, Martin Ford and Parminter, whose first name I forget, were all at the school when he was.
Lastly, teaching took me to Uganda. I shared accommodation initially, with several young bachelors, one of whom had been at Steyning too and was keen on birds. We were not frantic twitchers, but we built up a garden-list of 104 species, and my 'plant' had begun to grow to a respectable size. Wouldn't you envy drawing your curtains in the morning, to see a resting African Hobby, staring at you from a tree in your back garden?

In Shoreham *Clive Hope*

My own bird watching began whilst a schoolboy at Varndean Grammar School in Brighton in about 1951 or 1952. I joined the Field Club there and went on a few outings to places like Newhaven and to quarries in the Downs since most of the emphasis was on Geology. An older boy who was into bird watching suggested I tried Shoreham. So my first real birding outings (with a friend) were along the river between the old Norfolk Bridge and the old Toll Bridge or around the house boats between the Norfolk Bridge and the footbridge. Shoreham Beach was not built on very much as I recall in those days, lots of open shingle and bushes. We went to Shoreham by bus from Brighton and then walked everywhere. I was equipped with a pair of ex Army field glasses; magnification all of 4x and quite heavy! They cost £3-10s and were a Christmas present (that was quite a lot of money then). They were some help I suppose but one was never quite sure with many of the birds we saw if we were identifying them correctly. We did meet one or two adults who pointed out our first Redshanks, Dunlin and Ringed Plovers and we quickly became familiar with those species. The best birds (by a long way) were a female Long-tailed Duck on a small pool in the rubbish dump near the Railway bridge just south of the airport one February and soon after a Red- throated Diver in the Harbour. I can still picture them now - they made such an impression. The kind soul who put us on to these was a duffle-coated gent with proper binoculars. It was quite a long time before I saw another of either species! Other 'firsts' were Stonechat and Bar-tailed Godwit and we hadn't seen many Kingfishers, Reed Warblers or Wheatears before. I was unaware of the newly-formed SDOS or else I might have joined (Then I'd have met Tony Marr and might also be a world-roaming bachelor leading wildlife tours now!). There was a lull in my birding interest soon after this, brought about by College, marriage and a new job away from home, which wasn't to be properly rekindled until 1962. Upon returning to Sussex I joined the SOS in 1963 (and did meet BAEM) but not the SDOS until we moved to Storrington in 1982.
My best morning locally has to be Sunday August 26th 1991. I usually visit Cissbury from mid August through to early October at least once a fortnight on a weekend morning. This particular day looked promising from the first with a tempting south east wind. It was soon obvious that there were a good selection of migrants in the area including a Pied and several Spotted Flycatchers, Redstarts, warblers of 5 or 6 species, Wheatears and Whinchats. I walked round to the far SW side of the ring and on crossing back over it a Marsh Harrier appeared and continued on west. Then at about 09:45 I noticed a large soaring bird approaching from the SE which at first glance looked like a Heron but was soon obviously much larger and a Stork of some kind. As it drifted slowly across to the north of me the better light revealed a magnificent Black Stork! After watching it slowly disappear to the west and since no other birders were nearby I went down to the ringing

site in the hope they had seen it but no such luck. I apologetically recounted my good fortune.

Spotted Flycatcher – *Roger Wilmshurst*

Brighton memories *Peter Whitcomb*

My initial interest in both birds and wildlife was developed through a combination of countryside rambles with my family and occasional visits as a guest to meetings of the Brighton and Hove Camera Club. My father took me to see slide shows by Walter J.C. Murray and I can also remember slim books with black and white photography by Eric Hosking.

In our generation most started with the Observer's Book of Birds, the only pocket field guide available. The same illustrations, by Archibald Thorburn, were printed better and to a larger size in the three volumes I treasured by T.A. Coward, which were probably a birthday present. Second hand bookshops were perused for additions to a slow growing collection which included one of my favourite old books "Birds of the Field" by the Rev. C.A. Johns.

Early recollections as a child are hazy, but I remember my first Kingfisher, in Valentine's Park, Ilford. Our family never had a car, so expeditions out were by train, bus or on foot. Holidays were scout camps or the marvellous value Run-about season tickets on the trains. It seemed that Pagham was a little out of reach, and mostly I explored local areas like Hollingbury, Devil's Dyke, Wolstonbury and Danny Park. Even places like Falmer pond and nearby Stanmer Park, had an attraction for an afternoon stroll. There was no Arlington Resevoir or Brighton Marina in the 1960's.

At school I worked on a thesis during 1959/60 on the Birds of the Hollingbury Camp area. All the woods, then, had different names and not in common usage at all now. The Beech Woods were what we now call Hollingbury Woods, the name probably coming out of use after the 1987 hurricane. The Wildpark was divided into areas known as the Giant's Pit, the Skeleton Woods and the Ghost Woods. The golf course hasn't really changed, but building has encroached elsewhere eradicating breeding Nightingales and Grasshopper Warblers. I remember seeing a lot more owls around in those days, also the odd Cirl Bunting and Tree Sparrow. We used to look for nests, not knowing all the bird song or even looking skyward at migration times. To be honest, I didn't really know too much about migration at all except to know when to expect the first warblers, swallows and swifts! I can't remember recording anything really that rare in the 1960's. I suppose a Hoopoe flapping across a field like a giant butterfly near Moulescoomb station took some beating - and what a bird to start off my first ever RSPB Birdrace! Other interesting finds were Coal Tits breeding in an old Magpie's nest. I have never seen a Coal Tit here since (and I used the old spelling of Cole Tit in my notes). I found a resident flock of Ring Ouzels and took the well known Mr Bayliss Smith to see them. And lastly my first sightings of a pair of Collared Doves in 1960 were rejected by the strict Hon Recorder of the SOS, D.D. Harber. As a junior member of the SOS at the time, I suspect these were the first records for the SDOS area, coinciding with a slow spread initially from 1958 in the county.

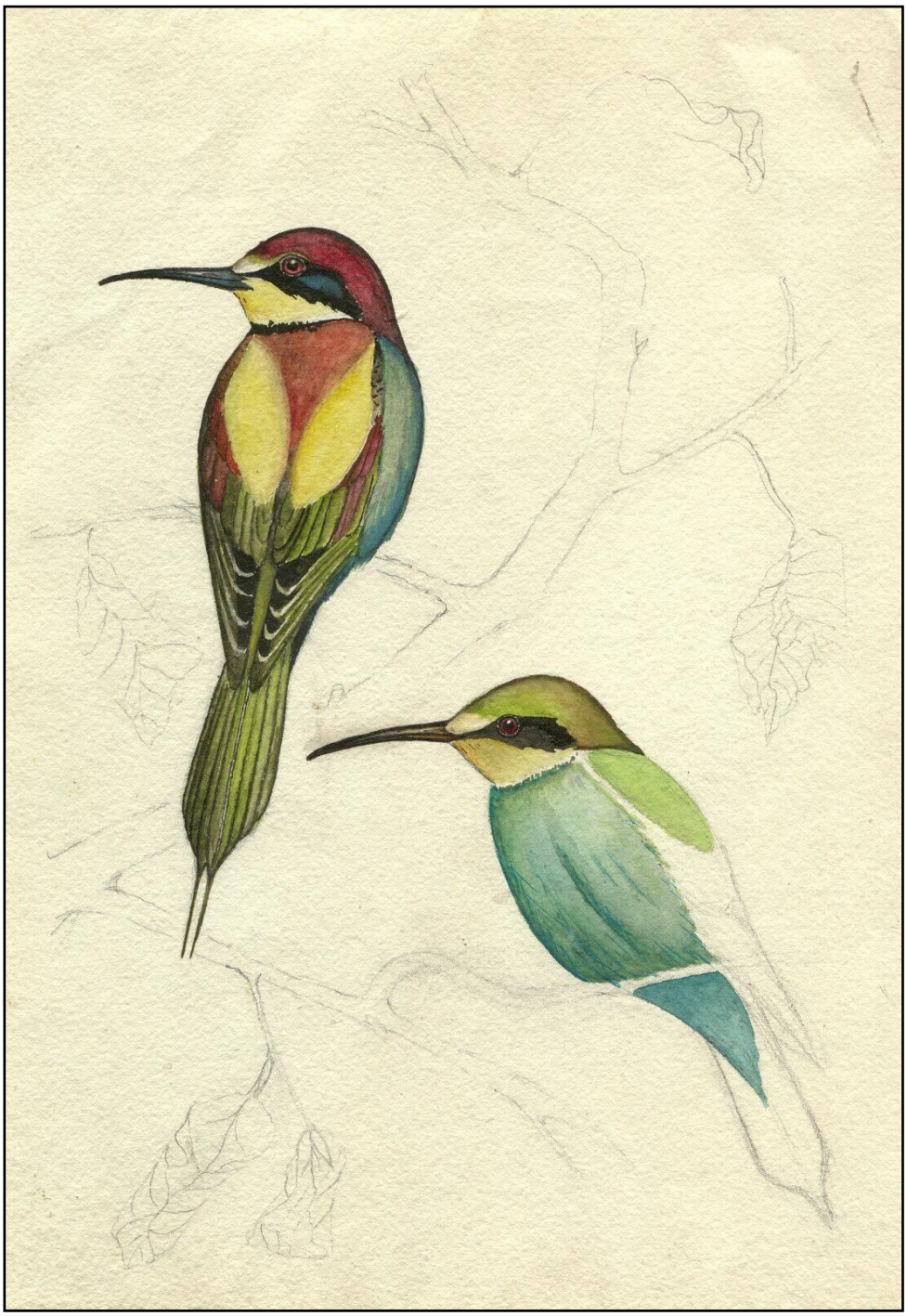
My interests wavered in the 1970's but regained momentum in the 1980's. I got quite excited seeing a lone Avocet probing the mud near Shoreham houseboats. That first local find always sticks in the memory, even though I've seen many small flocks flying elegantly

past the Marina in later years. I rejoined the SOS and discovered the SDOS. Things began to change. Being guided round new sites with an expert certainly is a better way of learning about bird recognition than identifying pictures in books! With the building of the Marina, then followed the introduction of sea-watching and those early alarm calls to get down there at first light. Trips to Pagham, Rye and other hotspots were now commonplace and many new species were being seen. We didn't get our first car in the family until 1987 and soon I was twitching to see rarities into Kent, Portland and further afield. Looking back it's strange I missed out on three of the important events of rarities whilst younger. These were the nesting Bee-eaters at Streat, which I read about after the event in Country Life magazine; the Sora Rail at Pagham which I never heard about at the time, and the more local Sociable Plover, again which I didn't hear about. The Gyr Falcon, nesting Stone Curlews, the Crane influx, etc were all events I read about in old Bird Reports. It makes you wonder with modern technology whether all these would have been 'advertised' a little bit more in current times? I guess so!

I've slowed down with twitching these days, perhaps keeping just within the Sussex boundaries to increase my County List. I still regret missing some good birds over the years with my lack of transport and a non-existent grape vine, but you still can't beat finding something of your own perhaps with some birding friends, like the Honey Buzzard that flew close over our heads at Hollingbury, or the surprise of seeing a Black Guillemot swimming inside the Marina, or nearly treading on a feeding Hoopoe on Hollingbury Camp. I've lots of good memories, long may they continue.

Bee-eaters (opposite) - *Roger Wilmshurst at 15 years old*

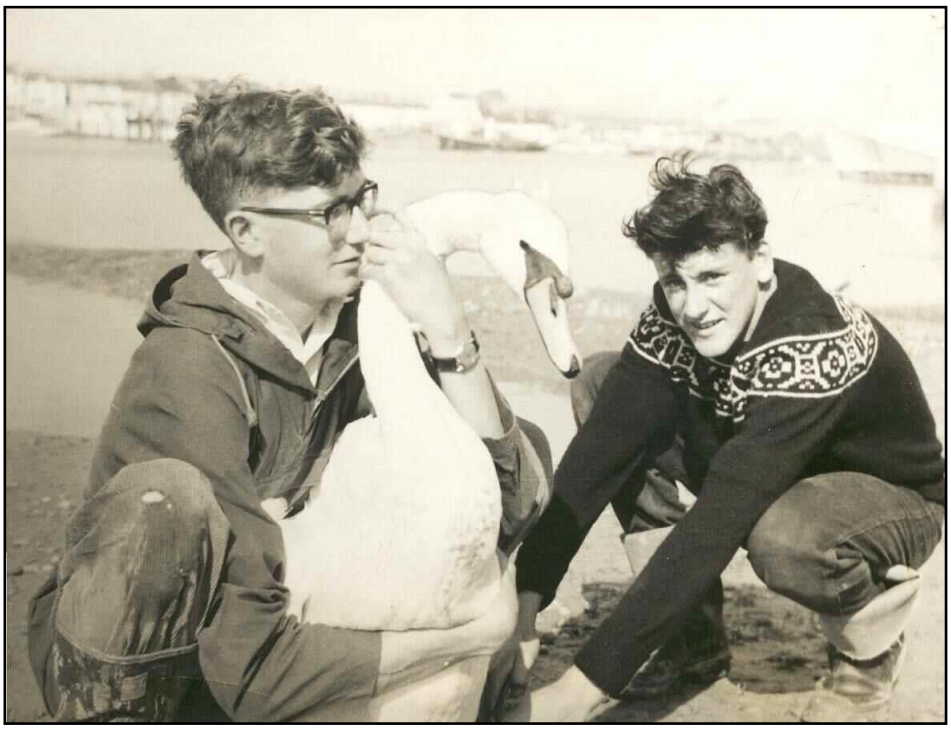
On the night of 31/8/55 Tony Marr told Roger of the site of the first nesting Bee-eaters in England. The very next day, Tony, Roger and Roger Ruston set off to Streat and found the birds. This was the first of many visits for Roger and his detailed drawings and this painting show the delight he derived from this amazing find. I wish there was sufficient space to reproduce his notes detailing the type of food the six adult birds brought to the seven young and the way an adult bird dealt with a bee before delivering it to the waiting youngster.



Swan Ringers *Shoreham Herald September 1958*

PASSERS-BY on Shoreham footbridge were shocked to see two youths catching swans in the mud. "Tell the RSPCA" said one, but there was no need. Investigations revealed that 18 year-old Tony Marr, of 59 The Green, Southwick, was "ringing" swans for the British Museum. He receives no pay, and has to pay for his own rings, which, for swans work out at about 5d. each. So far this year, he has ringed more than 1,000 birds, A former Steyning Grammar School boy, he awaits the results of an examination for the Civil Service.

A bird watcher for five years, he has been " ringing " for the British Museum since last October. So far none of his birds have turned up in any very far away place but he is still hoping. His 16-year-old assistant, Peter Farbridge, of Old Rectory-lane, Shoreham has been helping him for about six months, and also hopes to become a Museum "ringer" when he is 17, (the minimum age).



Tony Marr and Peter Farbridge catching swans for ringing 1958 – *Shoreham Herald*

An unusual birdwatching experience *Cyril Leeves*

It was about 1980 when I had perhaps my most unusual experience. At the time I was working in Brighton and was on my way to the office, but for some reason I did not take usual route along the seafront. Instead I drove down North Street to Castle Square and when I had to stop at the traffic lights at the Old Steine I saw that a Song Thrush was sitting on its nest in the red light. It was obviously undisturbed by the light going on and off. I contacted a reporter at the evening Argus.

The Thrush sitting on its nest in the red light - *Evening Argus*

To my amazement it was front page news that night. The article was accompanied by a marvellous photograph of the bird on its nest. It was a day when there had been little news.
The sequel to this is that the Council removed it for safety reasons and relocated it.

Round the Bowling Green *Judith Steedman*

It was the very end of 1948. I was 10 and my sister Sarah was 12 years old, and the family moved from the London suburb of Sutton to Topsham, a little salmon-fishing town on the Exe estuary in Devon. We were all soon exploring the beautiful surroundings, mostly on foot or bicycle, helped here and there by a bus or steam train. There was the wonderful tidal river with its surrounding marshes and nearby coast, Woodbury Common crowned by its wooded fort to the east, and across the river to the west, the distant Haldon Hills with the mysterious-looking Belvedere Tower against the skyline and beyond them — Dartmoor — which we were to discover a little later on when cycling to north Cornwall for holidays.
The move was the catalyst which spurred our interest in natural history to develop, and Sarah and I spent many hours and days exploring together and getting to know the plants, insects, birds and other animals, with much encouragement from our parents. Armed with

an ancient monocular (half a pair of binoculars) and the Observers Book of Birds we got to know the Cormorants, Mergansers and various Gulls and Waders on the estuary. Our nearest and most frequent walk was 'Round the Bowling Green'. This entailed going along Topsham Strand and the sea wall beyond with its view of miles of mud or water, then inland by the Bowling Green Marshes with their winter Fieldfares, Redwings, Peewits and Oystercatchers, and finally back "owt around" (as they say in Devon) to our house in Monmouth Street. Crossing the river by the ferry, once we had waited a while for the ferryman to leave his cider in the Passage Inn and row us across the fast-flowing current for 4d., brought us to the canal with its Divers and the Exminster marshes with their Reed buntings, Stonechats and Skylarks. Looking for nests became a special interest and we found lots, especially of course of the common species. After hours watching Skylarks landing and trying to find their nests we finally came across one right by a path without a search. Another highlight was a Peewit's nest with four beautiful blotchy eggs.
I started keeping a Nature Diary with some illustrations and in 1951, when an uncle gave me an especially nice exercise book for my birthday, it became a more 'grown-up' Field Note Book, which lasted till 1955. It contained, in addition to field notes, observations on the progress of caterpillars and stick insects I was raising, a few pressed flowers, patterns of dropped spores from the caps of fungi, and small paintings of insects and plants.
Twitching? Yes, once! My Field Note Book for Feb 16th 1952 says "Mr Wallace took me to the road between Starcross and Powderham and I saw an Avocet wading in pools that the tide left when it went down. It kept its beak under the water most of the time, then it flew and had black tips to its wings. It settled and stood straight, and then continued to search for food in the pools. The top of its head was black and apart from black markings on the back it was pure white. The beak turns up and it had a long neck and legs."

It's many years since the characterful salmon fishermen hung up their newly-tarred nets to dry Down Under, alongside the river below the Church Steps. Nowadays from there, with a north wind blowing, you hear the roar of the traffic as it hurtles over the new broad bridge across the Exe and up to the top of Haldon in no time at all on the great wide road. The hills are brought near, but have lost much of their silently mysterious and remote, alluring atmosphere. Yes, distance does lend enchantment. Topsham has become a sought-after and expensive part of Exeter.
But I think the river is cleaner — Topsham no longer pours its raw sewage straight into the water! There is a beautifully-designed Bird of Prey Viewpoint area on Haldon, Woodbury Common is an SSSI and 'Special Protection Area', the Bowling Green and Exminster marshes are now protected as a flourishing RSPB Reserve, and the Avocets have come to the estuary in a big way. "After all, who needs expensive houses? All we want are some nice muddy pools that the tide left when it went down……"

Life with a birdwatcher is never dull *Alison Noble*

Perhaps I should have been suspicious from the start. Most young girls being taken away for the weekend by their boy friend expect soft lights, wine and romance, not gales on the Northumberland coast, tea from the transport cafe and b&b with fag ash on the toast. Oh, ... and the romance, well having got soaked through two jumpers and a coat I returned to the car to dry-out, but I was alone as "there is a good fall of small stuff passing through" and that could not be interrupted! At that time I didn't even understand what he was saying but now, twenty five years later I do at least talk the talk.
Of course life has its strange quirks with a birdwatcher. Table manners for example, adults,

but not children are allowed to leave the table without prior notice. The head of the table, may, without fear of punishment, leap up from the table as if a fire has broken out, grab the binoculars from the kitchen worktop and race into the back garden to watch the Sparrowhawk - again. Surely it is the same one that went over the garden yesterday so why is it worth a look again today?

But it is not just inside the life of a birdwatcher varies from the norm. Most people cut the grass in one go, running the mower carefully in lines back and forth- but not the birdwatcher. Each sweep of the lawn ends with a careful scan of the sky for anything flying overhead, notes are made and, usually a wander round the garden in case something has happened since the last walk. It takes a long time but at least the grass gets cut, doing the hedge is far more traumatic. In spring "something may be nesting", in summer "they're on the second brood" while in autumn "old nests and leafy twigs provide roosting places" and during the winter it would be a shame to let the newly cut twigs get frosted so the hedge stays.

Driving - what a nightmare! The trip from Steyning to Shoreham cannot, you may think be too eventful but you have obviously never driven it with a birdwatcher. First there are the fields south of the by-pass to check for Lapwings, the river must be considered for swans, the hedges overlooking Passies Pond may contain the Egret and what is flying over the Old Cement Works? The deer of course, could be at Erringham and what is up over Mill Hill? At least the heron on the fence near the flyover is almost in driving sight line but all the rest seem to require 90 degree scan from facing front to out of the driver's window. Not good for the passenger's nerves.

So we get away from it all on holiday. Sandy beaches and sun loungers ... I think not. I have learnt not to take two towels in the suitcase as the tripod needs to sit along the back edge and hand luggage is for photographic film not paperbacks. Practice helps you to appreciate trips to local rubbish tips, muddy estuaries and even a sewage farm or two and evenings at mosquito infested streams have a certain charm if only for the aroma of insect repellent.

And learn to check before over-reacting. The 0800 numbers listed on the phone bill are not to be blamed on teenagers home from university but on it being migration time; returning home late from work means the Phalaropes are on Hove Lagoon and magazines in brown envelopes means a new subscription to BB. Life with a birdwatcher is never dull, slightly off-beat and cannot be easily explained to friends but, well, we learn to love them!

The Cement Works *Chris Wright*

Upper Beeding Cement works, a blot on the landscape or a wildlife haven?

When I moved to Upper Beeding in 1988 the Cement Works was still a working quarry. Although operations ceased in 1992 it was not until 1996 that I first set foot on the site and then only because of two events that had a significant impact on my life.

The first required an adjustment to a different life-style brought about by early retirement which was in itself greatly aided by the second – joining the SDOS and making the transition from "birdwatcher" to "birder".

This transition was facilitated by two of the County's best birders who were themselves soon to join the ranks of the early retired, Dave Smith and Bernie Forbes.

If ever there was a case of being in the right place at the right time! But I digress. At an SDOS meeting in the Spring of 1996 an announcement was made that volunteers were needed to monitor Peregrines which had been breeding at the Cement Works since 1994,

having been discovered there by Alan Kitson.
As I lived within walking distance I seemed to be an obvious candidate and that is how I met the co-ordinator, Neil Buckthorpe, with whom I still visit the site today. It has always been a difficult place to monitor and breeding success has been mixed over the years for one reason or another. Our visits are now unofficial as the site was acquired by developers in 1998.
However the developers have invested considerable resources in carrying out environmental surveys and last Autumn three new Peregrine ledges were created in the cliff face. One of these was immediately occupied by the birds and I understand that this is the first recorded resiting of an eyrie in the UK when the original site was still available.

Upper Beeding Cement works – *Terry Hicks*

Additional interest has been generated by a pair of Ravens which started to visit the area in 2001 and bred in 2002 when two young were raised. This nest was less than 100m. from the Peregrine eyrie although not in direct view, but more significantly it was less than 10m. from the ground.

Peregrine – *John Reaney*

Raven – *John Reaney*

This year despite there being five healthy youngsters standing on the nest in the last week of April, within days they were down to just two after two young were found shot under the nest with another corpse in the nest.
Following the Public Enquiry which took place (April/May 2003) to consider proposed development of the site the decision as to the future now rests with the Department of the

Environment and will be announced later in the year. However demolition of the old buildings has commenced. It seems certain that the Ravens will have to be moved and I am not sure if they will stay even if a new ledge is created for them.
Some local organisations wish to restore the area to downland, at least in part, and so the future is uncertain, but for me there are too few habitats for these unusual birds in this part of the country and I hope that the eastern part of the quarry will be retained so that these thrilling species have the chance to remain in residence.

Wheatear industry of the South Downs *David Harper*

Although they are scarce breeders in Sussex, Wheatears remain a familiar and attractive sight on the South Downs while on migration. In the past the autumn passage of these shockingly white-rumped little birds supported a major local industry. Vast numbers were caught for food by downland shepherds, mainly between Shoreham and Eastbourne; in the 1750s over 22,000 birds were killed annually around Eastbourne alone. As an immigrant myself to the SDOS area this cruel trade fascinates me.
The best information about catching Wheatears comes from the shepherd-cum-scholar John Dudeney who began to trap them near Mount Harry (north-east of Lewes) when he was about eight. At the age of ten, in 1792 he showed local historian Paul Dunvan a Wheatear's nest in exchange for a history book and a copy of Robinson Crusoe. These gifts fired Dudeney's passion for learning and in his late teens, while tending sheep on the downs above Falmer he hid books and geometry equipment in a hollow on Newmarket Hill. Thomas Hooker (vicar of Rottingdean and an inspiring teacher when not abetting local smugglers) took him under his wing. Dudeney soon became a schoolmaster, first as a part-timer in Rottingdean in 1802 and then in Lewes two years later after he had abandoned shepherding and wheatear-catching. Shortly before he died in 1852, he described his experiences in a paper, which was eventually printed as *'Wheatears and Shepherds'* in 1927 by the now-defunct Sussex County Magazine.
Wheatears were caught in 'coops' cut in the downland turf. A shepherd and his lad were able to look after 500-700 coops, which were sometimes so densely packed that the ground appeared to have been ploughed. Each coop consisted of a shallow hole called the 'pan' with a trench leading off it. The pan was made by marking out an area of about 45 x 30 cm and then digging a hole about 15 cm deep with sloping sides so that its base was only about 30 x 15 cm. Then a trench of the same depth was dug out from one of the long sides of the pan. This was about 60 cm long and also had sloping sides so that its width was about 12 cm at the top and 8 cm at the bottom. A thin stick with one or two horse-hair nooses was placed across the top of the trench 20-25 cm from the pan. The turf cut from the pan was then inverted length-ways over the trench to form a tunnel running from the edge of the pan and leaving the far end of the tunnel uncovered. Finally, the turf cut from the trench was put about 75 cm from the pan on the opposite side to the tunnel. Topped with a large flint, this was thought to attract birds which would perch on it and then notice the tunnel. Dudeney said that Wheatears inspected the tunnel out of curiosity, but other authors claimed that the birds fled there when mildly alarmed, as when a cloud went over the sun. Either way, any unfortunate bird that was caught in a noose was extracted when the coop was next visited (typically after an interval of several hours). They were then strangled and threaded onto Crow quills for transport. Most of the Wheatears were sold under contract to local poulterers in Brighton, Lewes, Eastbourne, Tunbridge Wells and Hastings. Although many Wheatears were destined for local consumption, others were packed in barrels of fat - or potted in small jars - and sent to London or even

farther afield. Wheatears were often baked in a pie, although gourmets preferred them wrapped in vine leaves. Their fine taste and fatness led to the nickname of 'English Ortolan', referring to the Ortolan Buntings which used to be imported alive into Shoreham and other large ports from Rotterdam. Other small birds were also caught in the coops. Whinchats could be sold to only some poulterers, and Dudeney reckoned that Stonechats were "good for nothing". Starlings were also impossible to sell and so the shepherds usually released them. Most species that were caught in small numbers, such as Meadow Pipits, were eaten by the shepherds, although the fate of the Wrynecks that Dudeney noted were "not very often ensnared" is unknown. Trapping started around St James' Day (25 July) and petered out in late September. Fairs could temporarily reduce trapping over a wide area since the shepherds needed about ten days to prepare their flocks and to move them the often considerable distances involved. A few lamb fairs were late enough to delay the start of catching; that at Lindfield (Haywards Heath) on 5 August meant that Wheatear-catching between Brighton and Lewes only got into full swing after that date. Most of the sheep fairs only affected the end of the catching season. For example, that at Lewes, attended by 30,000 sheep in 1792, was on 2 October, although it eventually divided into two held on 21 and 28 September. Even when traps were set, catching rates were very variable.

Wheatear – *John Reaney*

On the Downs above Kingston-near-Lewes, Dudeney seldom caught more than 20 Wheatears per day. Closer to the coast, catches tended to be higher. For example, he caught up to 160 birds per day at Westside Farm, which ran from Rottingdean to Black Rock at Brighton. Dudeney 'thought' that he had heard of a daily catch of 1,200 birds, but this may have been an exaggeration of the impressive total of about 1,000 reported by Pennant writing in 1766. Predators including Sparrowhawks, Buzzards, Ravens and Stoats killed some of the catch and frightened other Wheatears from the trapping areas. Human

passers-by also disturbed birds from around the coops and sometimes removed captives, either to release them or to eat them. Some people left a small coin behind, but this was often worth less than the bird's market value and many birds were stolen. Despite these losses, some shepherds earned more from Wheatear-catching than they could from shepherding for the whole year. Poulterers paid the equivalent of 2.5p per dozen in the mid-eighteenth century, rising to 7.5p by 1800 and 30p in 1890. If they had sufficient time, shepherds could get even more by selling directly to the public. For example, in 1798 Dudeney got 15p a dozen from gentry visiting Devil's Dyke, north of Brighton. To put these figures into context, around 1800 an under-shepherd was paid about £6 a year (equivalent to about 1,000 Wheatears sold to poulterers), although a head-shepherd could earn up to £30 (5,000 Wheatears). The Brighton poulterers held an annual winter dinner at which the Wheatear catchers were paid; the most successful receiving about £50 (8,000 Wheatears).

Since the South Downs have been extensively farmed for about 6,000 years, Wheatear-catching may have had a very long history. It was certainly in full swing by the Stuart period. William Wilson of Eastbourne supplied Charles II with Wheatears, although it is unclear whether it was his loyalty or his Wheatears that earned him a barony in 1666 immediately after the Restoration of the monarchy. Wilson may even have owed his life to Wheatears: on Good Friday 1658, one of his wife's Wheatear pies distracted a detachment of Roundhead dragoons for long enough for William to burn incriminating royalist correspondence. Not surprisingly, Wheatears later figured prominently in his coat of arms. Demand for Wheatears increased with the development of the towns of Brighton, Eastbourne and Tunbridge Wells. Supply, however, was already falling by 1802 for unknown reasons. Whatever the cause, Dudeney declared in 1849 that Wheatear "numbers now are so decreased that some shepherds do not set up any coops, as it does not pay for their trouble". In addition, local poulterers found that eating small birds of any kind was becoming far less fashionable. Human disturbance around coops increased as more people had time to spend at leisure on the downs. Farmers became increasingly hostile to the cutting of Wheatear coops, especially after the great agricultural depression of the late 1870s when cereal prices collapsed. Sheep numbers fell, many shepherds lost their jobs and much of the grassy sheepwalk was invaded by scrub. The last of the annual poulterers' dinners for Wheatear-catchers was held in about 1880, although even then Hughs of Brighton had about 50 shepherds on their books. By the time that trapping Wheatears in July and August was banned by the Bird Protection Act of 1897, the Wheatear industry was virtually dead. A few local hotels obtained a small supply of Wheatears from professional bird-catchers who used clap-nets rather than coops. When challenged, these rogues would claim to be hired to catch Starlings for farmers. In reality most were paying the farmers for permission to catch birds. This rather pathetic final fling of the Wheatear industry died out during the 1920s, leaving our downs as an apparently safe haven for migrating Wheatears. But something may now be going wrong. Since moving to the SDOS area in 1985, I have ringed 60 Wheatears on autumn passage on the South Downs between Black Rock (Brighton), Ditchling Beacon, Offham Hill and Newhaven Fort. This was the area where Dudeney did most of his catching and included the sites around Rottingdean which were especially renowned for their fat Wheatears. The modern birds were in merely moderate body condition. Their mean weight of 25.5 g was similar to that of non-migrating Wheatears, and their fat loads (visible through their skin when the feathers were gently blown aside) were as low as those of the largely resident Stonechats caught at the same time. Certainly modern Wheatears were not "the little lumps of fatt" described by

John Aubrey in the 1680s. The Wheatears' droppings revealed that most of their prey were insects known to be decreasing in abundance, such as small dung beetles. Sadly, the obvious dangers of the shepherds' coops may have been replaced by the invisible threat of the impoverished food supplies in the modern agricultural landscape.

Ornithology, birding and record-keeping *Jim Steedman*

Some years ago, when I was editor of the Newsletter of the Sussex Branch of the British Butterfly Conservation Society I reprinted an article that described an imaginary meeting between the writer and another butterfly enthusiast. When asked if he was also a member of the Society, the enthusiast replied, "Oh, do you mean the BBSC?" The writer responded by pointing out that the correct abbreviation was BBCS. "No, BBSC", the other insisted, "the British Butterfly Spotters Club. How much time do you and they spend simply spotting and photographing butterflies, and how much on recording and conservation?"

Sparrowhawk – *Jim Steedman*

Well, fifteen years on, things don't seem to me to have changed all that much – at least, not so that you would notice.

As I write this, I am about halfway through reading Mark Cocker's 'Birders – Tales of a Tribe'. It is a fascinating book that, if you haven't read it you really should, as it's full of marvellous stories of birders and their extraordinary exploits in search of rare, elusive birds. If you, like me, are uncertain about the 'folk-lore' surrounding Richie Richardson, the east bank at Cley and nearby Nancy's café, this is the place to fill in the background.

But though there is a lot about birds and birding, the book seems to say little about 'ornithology', i.e. the study of birds. True, there is some mention of 'patch watching' but mainly in connection with the art of discovering your own rarities. Every so often, I re-read 'The Young Ornithologists' by A. C. Hillyer. This, I am slightly ashamed to admit, is meant to be a book for and about children, and the introduction of the 'hero' to ornithology. Admittedly now somewhat dated, the emphasis is on the observation and recording of birds, with particular importance given to the finding of nests and recording nesting behaviour by the keeping of notebook accounts, as well as keeping field records and so on. This was how things were done when our own Ornithological Society and many others were born.

With the development of specialist organisations such as the British Trust for Ornithology, and its specific groups for ringing, recording nesting and similar activities, there may be less need today for individuals to keep such records in the 'old-fashioned' way. But I suspect that as a result our general membership now probably has a poorer knowledge of the breeding and other behaviour of the species in our local area than did our predecessors in the early days of this Society. And this in a time when the advent of inexpensive desktop computer power enables you and I to keep personal records in a way that could not have been dreamt of by a professional organisation a generation ago. Even in the early 90s, removable storage space on computers was at such a premium that quite elaborate techniques were devised to cram as many records as possible onto a single 3½-in diskette (which then cost more than £1). Today a CD-ROM costing a few pence will hold 500 times as much information,

Sadly, partly because of the original storage restrictions, many organisations (such as the BTO and SOS) were disinclined to keep substantial records of common species such as House Sparrows and Starlings. This is a sad loss in these days, when this sort of information would have provided a useful accurate yardstick by which to measure current declines.

Nowadays we have no excuse. We can all contribute to current knowledge by recording the common birds and other wildlife on our local 'patch' or in our gardens, and by pooling our records, contribute to a store of information that will serve the preservation of the environment for generations to come. It does not take any special skills in identification to do this – merely the tenacity to regularly "keep on keeping on".

So what is an interest in birds really about? Is it, as Mark Cocker himself admits, mainly the pursuit of rarities that, virtually by definition, are almost always birds in the wrong place at

the wrong time, and going in the wrong direction – birds that are totally unrepresentative of the norm? Or is it Ornithology – the study (and recording) of birds in their natural state? As in the case of the 'Butterfly Spotters Club', are we in danger of coming to the time when we should rename ourselves the 'Shoreham District Birders Club'?

The humble House Sparrow - *Keith Noble*

Sussex Ornithological Society *Audrey J Wende*

The Sussex Ornithological Society was formed in 1962 in order to widen the scope of studying and recording birds to the whole of Sussex. The early history of the Society is fascinating, with the names of many people who helped throughout the early years now being famous. Such names as Jeffery Boswall, Richard S R Fitter, I J Ferguson-Lees, Chris Mead, Richard Porter, Tony Marr, Guy Mountfort, Michael Shrubb, and many more, all contributing to the Bird Reports which have been published annually since 1962. John Stafford whilst being President of the Shoreham District Ornithological Society was also able to help the SOS get off to a flying start. These days many members of the Shoreham District Ornithological Society are also members of the Sussex Ornithological Society, doing much valuable work within both societies.

In 2002 the Sussex Ornithological Society celebrated its 40th Anniversary, and by early 2003 had 1655 members. The society provides a focal point for all those interested in birding, whether they are concerned with the preparation of detailed scientific papers or merely endeavouring to identify what they have seen. It is the depth and breadth of the interests of the membership that gives the society its strength and continuity.

Many SOS members contribute to the Society's Annual Bird Report by recording the birds they see within the county and some 50,000 records are sent to the County Recorder annually. This figure also includes the records of the Shoreham DOS members which are passed on to give a county wide perspective of the health of Sussex birds. Survey work is also carried out in partnership with the BTO and RSPB. In both 2001 and 2002 the Sussex

Bird Report came third in a competition for the best Bird Report from the country's bird clubs, organised by the British Trust for Ornithology. SOS and SDOS frequently have combined outings which have proved to be very friendly and successful.
The SOS website at www.susos.org.uk has been a very popular way of advertising the Society. The webmaster reports over 2,000 hits a week. This enables many people to know if a rare bird arrives in the county and where it can be found. Members send in news of birds on their patch, and particularly at migration times the sea-watching groups keep us informed of their sightings.
Birdwatching is a leisure pursuit which is becoming ever more popular and it is to be hoped that both Societies will see an increase in membership over future years. However, great care has to be taken to ensure that the birds in Sussex are protected from the ever increasing demands on the countryside and coastline. The quiet corners of Sussex where birdsong can be heard and the study of birds can take place are jewels to be handed on to future generations. Over the years many of the bird rich areas of Sussex have been protected and it is to be hoped that this will continue in partnership with the RSPB, SWT, EN, BTO and SDOS. Shoreham District Ornithological Society and the Sussex Ornithological Society can be proud of their past history, and can congratulate themselves on their achievements.

Strong links *Mike Russell*

As a past member, I feel rather honoured in penning this article in celebration of 50 years of the SDOS, but hopefully this won't be an impediment to showing the strong links that I personally, and the Sussex Wildlife Trust, have developed for nearly two decades.

On arrival as Woods Mill Warden for the Sussex Wildlife Trust in January 1985, I soon found out about the Society and started to attend the meetings. Woods Mill was also on the very edge of their recording range, which precipitated a few years of detailed records for the reserve. I don't think records had been regularly submitted up until then so I was keen that this rather small, but perfectly formed, reserve received some recognition for its ornithological interest.

Woods Mill has good populations of woodland species that has been embellished by a regular pair of breeding Kingfishers, occasional nesting Grey Wagtails, and being in close proximity to a number of Nightingale territories. In fact the change to a preference for damp blackthorn thickets means that this latter species has now become a regular breeder. Add to this the pair of Barn Owls that nested in our designer box last year, the reserve can boast of a good range of breeding species.

With it being watched on an almost daily basis, there is an impressive list of passage migrants that have been recorded, including a few Pied Flycatchers and Common Redstarts, Icterine, Wood and Grasshopper Warblers and a delightful Garganey that stayed for a couple of weeks.

In early May 1988, the two rarest migrants arrived within a week of each other. Though strictly speaking one was just outside the reserve and was somewhat "assisted". This of course was the famous Oreham Common Little Bittern, which I regard as a Woods Mill bird, as we made about £300 as donations for using the car park! He was around for about

9 days, having denuded the pond of great crested newts, while the Night Heron, that also turned up in that time was around only for a day.

Not only were copious records sent in to the Society in that time, but they also took part in the regular bird weekends held at Woods Mill as well. During my time as warden, and on subsequent occasions I have given talks at the meetings, which I have always enjoyed, but can't vouch for the audience! The emphasis has changed much more to schools work at the Mill now which continues to grow from strength to strength, and the reserve is an absolute ideal outdoor classroom.

The Trust has also worked with the Society on a number of occasions where wildlife has been threatened within the district and has always been grateful for the detailed information it has been able to supply to support the conservation case. That is still going on today in cases like the proposed developments at the Cement Works.

My "elevation" to a more desk bound job and moving out of the Woods Mill house meant that since 1993 I haven't been keeping up any regular recording which I know sounds a bit daft but even still working there it's amazing that how much time goes by when you don't even go out on the reserve. This I vow to rectify and will make sure that I start submitting Woods Mill records again this year.

Since 1999, I have also become very involved in recording within Henfield Parish and have been instrumental in setting up Henfield Birdwatch which currently has over a 100 members, most of whom are involved in regular recording of birds in their gardens.

Like SDOS, Henfield Birdwatch encourages and promotes watching and recording in your local area and through this get people to be involved and concerned in the conservation of their own communities. It is so important that this strong local identity continues and thrives and where grassroots conservation can be at its most effective.

I hope and am sure that the Shoreham Ornithological Society will continue to thrive for at least another 50 years and to contribute to keeping Shoreham and its environs a great place for birds and for people to enjoy seeing them.

Information and birding *Terry Hicks*

Bird sightings and information flow are synonymous. In the early days the post was the only method of getting a sighting message across the country, if you didn't take it yourself. More recently telephones, pagers, mobile phones with text messaging and of course now the internet is in use. The SOS have gone into the internet in a big way, with an excellent comprehensive site, containing recent bird sightings of note, published for all to see. There is also membership details and lots, lots more.

The SDOS entered this arena in February 2002 in a small way. With limited resources (me), we needed something but what? A colleague at work suggested why not run a user group through yahoo.com ? The idea was set up, allowing members of the SDOS who have an e mail address to send in messages of: bird sightings, forthcoming events and

other nature related topics, whereupon everyone registered gets their own copy of the message.
The system works well in that there is limited administration effort required and messages pass on very quickly. The level of usage is good as on average there are about 50 messages a month. Typical example messages are below.

Raptors - *Bernie Forbes*
Hi to you all, Had a pleasant circular walk from the Chantry hill car park via Lee farm/Harrow hill today. Few Willow warblers on the move, couple of Corn bunting still singing. It took some time before we saw any Buzzard, in the end we found 4 one of which was a juvenile. Picked up high in the sky a hunting Hobby chasing House Martins it was joined by a second bird and they briefly hunted together. This is a very good area for Raptors, and over the next 3 months is worth visiting to look for various species. The central path from the car park running south towards Lee farm and Harrow hill is the best view point. Paying attention to the valley west of the path. Good luck Bernie.

Outing To Rackham Woods - *Shena Maskell*
Rackham Woods and Greatham Bridge 4th Dec.2002 (with Bernie Forbes, Jim Steedman et al)
At Rackham it Rained all morning so we walked through the woods learning fieldcraft.
1.. Willow Tits excavate new nest holes every year. Marsh Tits use existing holes. This helps identification in Spring when both species present in same wood.
2.. Lesser Spotted Woodpecker nest holes are often under the junction of a branch with the trunk, i.e. the 'armpit'!
3.. In a Tit feeding party you often get Tree-creeper, Goldcrest and warblers as well. Check them out for Firecrest and even rarities!
4.. When trying to differentiate between Hen Harrier and Monties look at the 'fingers'. Hen shows 5 distinct fingers, Monties 4 ,(so it looks slimmer winged)
5.. When Lapwings are 'put up' by a raptor, check them for Ruff, Golden Plover and who knows, Sociable Plover! Check, check, check!
Greatham Bridge Sunshine, so went Owling!
First glimpse of Barn Owl at 2pm approx,carrying prey! Bernie told us that this pair of Barn Owls were raising young! In December!!!. However Bernie thought the young would not survive when independent, as weather would not be conducive to vole population,ie food shortage. Same wood held 2 calling Little Owl. Checked Lapwings in flight,saw 2 Ruff with them, very 'pointy' in flight. 2 Common Buzzard circling over escarpment, uptilted wings ,so not Honey Buzzard (flatter profile)and wrong time of year!.Bernie told us that you can sex HBs by thickness of band on tail edge. Thicker is male (that follows!!oops sorry chaps!)

Greylag and Canada Geese flock were checked out. One Snow Goose and a Bar-Headed Goose present but Bernie doubted their origin because of the company they were keeping! Over the Wildbrooks watched 3 Hen Harriers, (2 ring-tails and 1 male).No sign of Short-eared Owls today.

Ruff – *Stanley Allen*

Lapwing – *Keith Noble*

The user group with the message system has given life and very close contact to the Society throughout the whole year.

Numbers of the user group are small enough to allow comment, reply and advice about recognition and we are just starting to put pictures on to a notice board, which I am sure will get more heavily used as more members use digital cameras. But where do we go to next?

GARDEN WATCH

A view of the garden *Martin Ford*

During the lifetime of the SDOS the most familiar garden birds e.g. Blackbird, Blue Tit, Robin have appeared constantly in observations submitted by members. However changes have occurred, and sadly Cirl Bunting (last recorded in 1970) no longer features and Yellowhammer and Corn Bunting once fairly common are a rare treat. Starling and House Sparrow also occur less frequently and in smaller numbers. On the plus side Collared Doves began to appear in Sussex in the late 1950s. The first SDOS record was in 1964 and are now a regular visitor to most gardens. Sparrowhawks whose numbers dipped dramatically due to use of pesticides are now widely reported. Early days of the society saw no systematic recording and members would report only birds thought worthy of mention. Generally these were migrants such as Pied Flycatcher, Common Redstart, Wryneck and Ring Ouzel. Lesser recorded migrants included Wood Warbler, Marsh Warbler (1959) and Corncrake (1956).

Robin – *John Stafford*

Vagrants such as Hoopoe, Woodchat Shrike and Bluethroat have occurred. During hard winters good numbers of Redwing and Fieldfare have been recorded along with

Brambling, Siskin, Woodcock and occasionally a Waxwing. In the first report in 1953, J. Twort wrote an article about birds seen in a Southwick garden since 1945 and these included Yellowhammer, Cirl Bunting, Firecrest and a singing Nightingale. From 1962, when Cirl Bunting was still being recorded, the number of members contributing records varied from a maximum of twelve down to just two in 1980. Although, in 1979 three comprehensive reports were submitted from gardens at Coombes and Goring and in West Worthing John Newnham recorded all birds in or seen from his garden, these included Brent and White Fronted Geese, Whimbrel and Rose Ringed Parakeet. 1981 was a year of change within the Society and the garden bird returns were given a more structured framework and a survey of the birds feeding in the garden was established for the winter months. By 1984 there were thirteen contributors to the survey and a maximum of 28 species per garden was recorded, this compares to a maximum of 31 for the winter of 2001 - 2002 when twenty-four returns were made. 1985 saw the last of these recorded observations until 1991 although Richard Ives recorded birds seen from his garden at Broadwater in 1987 and amongst others these included Montagu's Harrier, Red Footed Falcon and Woodcock. 1991 saw the garden bird feeding survey resurrected and this ran until 1998 with a maximum number of twenty two contributors in 1996.

In 1999 the survey continued in a slightly different format with birds recorded which used gardens for any reason, but not just 'flying over'. Also the bird numbers were recorded throughout the year. Since 1999 a total of seventy-eight species have been recorded. Using the autumn and winter returns a comparison is made of the ten top most common birds using all gardens. During the autumn - winter period of 2001 - 2002 records from 24 gardens were submitted with Blue Tit, Robin, Blackbird and Collared Dove appearing in all gardens. These were followed by Starling, Dunnock and Wren in 23 gardens, Great Tit in 22, and House Sparrow, Wood Pigeon and Chaffinch in 21 gardens. Greenfinch in 20 and Song Thrush in 19 gardens respectively were the next most recorded species. With the promise of changes to climate and land management our survey of garden birds in 2053 could make interesting comparisons to today.

SEA WATCHING

Gullden memories *Keith Noble*

This recollection of birds and people, books and bread balls, marks three anniversaries, a gold and two silvers. Fifty years ago when the SDOS was born, I was already noting birds in my I Spy book. Twenty five years ago, on the same day as my wedding to Alison, Ann Taylor married Bob Scott and left her job in the RSPB South East England Regional Office at Portslade to live at Northward Hill. I moved from Sandy to take her place and join Richard Porter, Gill Marriott, Sue Hitchings and Peter Martin. Alison started work for the RSPCA, running its junior membership, and we bought a house in College Road, Upper Beeding. Across the road, visible from the kitchen sink, was the slope of Windmill Hill. Its chief interest then was the great flock of Corn Buntings which used to gather each autumn. In 1981 my best estimate was 550 buntings, but on 7 August a quite different bird caught my eye – a Herring Gull with yellow legs. The stubble had just been burned and gull flocks were pausing here from their commuting between the sea and Small Dole rubbish tip. Two days later there were at least 30 yellow-legged gulls, one with a green ring, and I knew that I was seeing something special. At that time, Peter Grant and others were

writing in 'British Birds' about occasional sightings of Herring Gulls with yellow legs. Clearly they were different from our pink-legged native birds, but just what race did they belong to and where did they come from? (When he was editor of the London Bird Report, Peter had encouraged me to write a paper on the birds of Rainham Marsh. I helped to organise regular counts along the Thames between Tower Bridge and Dartford at that amazing time when the river came clean and first attracted thousands of wildfowl and waders. Peter, with Jeffery and Pamela Harrison, wrote a fine book about it – The Thames Transformed – and I wish he had lived longer to share my delight as Rainham , so nearly lost to development, now starts its exciting future as an RSPB reserve.) I told Peter about my home flock, and 47 counted on the Small Dole tip. There I collected a bag of moulted back and wing feathers and easily sorted the darker feathers of the yellow-legged birds from those of the British form. In his next British Birds note, Peter reported a growing number of records of yellow-legged Herring Gulls, including by far the largest flocks in the Adur valley. He concluded that most were of the race *michahellis* from the Mediterranean and Iberia. For a little while the birds outside my window were of national interest. Since then, yellow-legged gulls have become regular visitors in greater numbers to Britain, and the odd pair has bred here. They are now treated as a different species from the Herring Gull. Peter Grant's articles and book on gull identification demonstrated how much could be learned from very careful observation. Other experts have continued to establish criteria to identify various races of the larger gulls. I grew up with the Peterson Field Guide, and still remember the thrill of its colour plates packed with so many more birds than my Observer's Book. The emphasis was on identifying full species in the field, and the tick list admitted very few subspecies.

Mediteranean Gull – *John Stafford*

Now, we have a great range of field guides, specialist volumes, magazines and videos, and much better optical and photographic equipment. Many more people study birds and have accumulated great experience here and abroad. Identification ought to be easier, but as we are now encouraged to be splitters rather than lumpers, there are fresh challenges. Are there, for instance, Caspian Gulls in our local flocks, and could I recognise one?

When the RSPB team moved into larger offices in Church Street, Shoreham, we were well placed to watch birds before and after work around the mudflats, creeks and saltings. In a 45 minute lunch break I could walk across the town footbridge, round behind the houseboats and back via the Norfolk Bridge and High Street. On 11 January 1985, I saw from the footbridge a juvenile 'Common-type' gull with a distinctly thick pink, dark-tipped bill. Luckily it was a bright day and I had brought my camera and mirror lens. It stayed long enough for a few shots which I sent to Rob Hume at The Lodge. Like me, Rob ran RSPB Film Shows and worked with Local Groups before he became Editor of Birds. Back in 1973, he and fellow gull students at Swansea had identified Britain's first Ring-billed Gulls, so I sought his confirmation that this American vagrant was what I had photographed. He agreed and for a while I thought that I had found a first for Sussex - in fact it followed an adult at Weir Wood just a month earlier. I watched the gull again a few days later, with Tony Prater, my second Regional Manager and Sussex Bird Recorder. While at Shoreham Tony produced, with John Marchant and Peter Hayman, *' Shorebirds - a guide to the waders of the World'*, a classic identification work to follow his major conservation book, *'Estuary Birds of Britain and Ireland'*. Many hundreds of ring-billed gulls have now reached Britain, but they are much rarer in Sussex than in counties to the West which are slightly nearer America.

Common Gull (2nd Winter) – *Keith Noble*

As Alison, Robert, Gemma and I outgrew College Road, we moved across the valley to Steyning. The RSPB team has grown too, and now has its office near Brighton Station, where gulls are mostly the birds that nest among the chimney pots behind us, or the subject of many phone enquiries about aggressive adults and 'lost babies'. I think back to other birds at Shoreham: an immaculate adult Iceland Gull one crisp winter morning; hefty

biscuit-coloured Glaucous Gulls; a strongly-patterned black and white Little Gull, floating lightly in the harbour like a paper boat or phalarope. Such individuals stand out from the many thousands of gulls which flock to or through the Shoreham area. Our Doctors, John Newnham and Barrie Watson, can write from great experience of seabird habits and migrations, so I will finish with a short tribute to one more particular bird.

In January 1993 a first-year Mediterranean Gull turned up at Shoreham, with a small metal ring on one leg and a big white ring marked 24H on the other. For five more years it spent roughly half its life around the Harbour, leaving us for the summer. Perhaps it went back to breed in the Dutch colony where it had been ringed as a chick.

Mediterranean Gulls are no longer the rare visitors they were when I started birding, and have established growing colonies in Britain, but they are still well worth looking at. I photographed 24H on several occasions, admiring its pale wings, strong red bill and the neat white marks which made the eyes stand out from its black hood in Spring. I wanted a picture, which would clearly show its Darvic identity ring. A couple of shots taken by gently drawing up my car beneath its lamp post perch were my best efforts until just after Christmas 1997 when I took a loaf wi' nowt taken out to the Harbour mouth. As soon as I lobbed the first bread balls onto the shingle, 24H flew to the bait with a few companion gulls, a Redshank and a Turnstone. The resulting portraits, filling the frame with the ring clearly legible, are among my favourites. Next autumn 24H did not appear, and I imagine that other Shoreham watchers, like me, missed its familiar presence.

Turnstone on the beach - *Keith Noble*

Herring Gull with young – *Keith Noble*

Mediterranean Gull ring marked 24H - *Keith Noble*

Gulls come here in many forms and from distant places. I look forward to future enjoyment from scanning their flocks at the Fort and the footbridge, by the airport and up the valley, to fill more notebooks and memories.

A reflection and review of 50 years *John Newnham*

WHY stand we gazing on the sparkling brine,
With wonder smit by its transparency,
And all-enraptured with its purity?……--

In 1883 William Wordsworth, enchanted by the foreshore on the Isle of Man, opened one of his poems by asking a similar question to one I frequently ask myself after spending endless hours *"gazing on the sparkling brine"*. Clearly my enchantment is not in the sea itself, although on some occasions this can be awe inspiring, but in the birds which are associated with, or more often seen flying over, the sea. Of all the ornithological activities there are none which have produced more tales and yarns, more banter between observers and groups or more anecdotes of how certain fabulous birds had just been missed.

Mediterranean Gull – *John Reaney*

All who have been involved in sea-watching will recall missing rare species or, more infuriatingly, have been present at a watch and have failed to see the particularly exciting bird or flock which all the other observers are enjoying. Why is this activity so popular when the watching is frequently cold, wet and often not very productive? Furthermore the views of birds are often mere fleeting glimpses or at such a great range that only a fraction of the birds' plumage details can be seen. The activity has little conservation value yet details are recorded with meticulous care. Psychologists may liken the addiction of this activity to some of the aspects of gambling. In both there is the possibility of a prize but one never knows quite how large the prize will be or, perhaps more importantly, when the prize will be delivered.

Sea-watching, as an ornithological activity, has been an integral part of the 50 years of the Shoreham District Ornithological Society's (SDOS) life and in this article I endeavour to briefly consider not only the local history and achievements but also to indulge with some memories from my notebook by reminiscing over the watches which are most indelibly etched in my mind.

With the shoreline never more than a few miles away from most members' homes it is perhaps not surprising that so much attention has been paid to the sea in this area. Considerable documentation of these activities has appeared in the annual SDOS reports with articles on coastal, visible migration appearing in 35 of the 49 reports (1953-2001) and nearly 9% of the *ca* 3000 published pages are devoted to this subject.

Turnstones – *Keith Noble*

Past reports contain 137 graphs, the first in 1978, but as years have progressed, and more data has become available, the figures have depicted trends and changes rather than merely displaying information for one year. Between 1980 and 1991 the reports included detailed

tables of the day totals for each of the regularly recorded species. The pattern of passage of nineteen species were plotted in the *Birds of Shoreham* (1978-86) published in 1988 and patterns drawn from local watching over longer periods have been shown in *Birds of Sussex* and various papers in the *Sussex Bird Report*. Indeed local sea-watching records can be found in most of the published works on the county's birds.

The annual accounts of sea-watching and visible migration have been written for the SDOS report by (in chronological order) Tony (BAE) Marr (4), Frank Severs (6), John Newnham (20), Mark Welfare (1), Mike Hall (2) and Paul Brayshaw (2). In several years other articles have been published including accounts of watching from Selsey Bill (BAEM 1959-65) and in the 1980 report no less than five pieces, comprising 27 of the 70 pages, were on various aspects of sea-watching. Compilation of the records and the conversion of these into the annual reports is a time consuming, although rewarding, exercise which has been made easier in recent years with the advent of the computer. Computers are excellent at "number crunching" and are, therefore, ideal for storing and analyzing the data gathered from sea-watching.

All the Worthing area records, for the regularly seen species, between 1978 and 2002 are held on computer with a total of nearly 9100 hours of observations recorded for these 25 years. This amounts to nearly 8% of the available daylight hours! As expected the Spring season is the most popular time for watching with May recording 2526 hours, April with 2294 hours and 868 hours of records from March. During the autumn October has been the most watched month with 583 hours. The hours watched during the winter months are clearly limited by the short daylight hours. Since 1986 the records have been maintained with greater detail and notes are held for 3411 different days; about 58% of the total days in this period. During the early years of the Society most of the watching was done from Widewater beach but in recent decades most of the records have come from either the Worthing area or Brighton Marina. Worthing Borough Council's promenade shelter opposite Marine Gardens (the closest to my home when I first moved back to Worthing in 1978) has been the "HQ" for watching at Worthing.

This venue is often shared, particularly in the warmer months, either by one or two of Worthing's homeless or by amazed and enquiring promenade strollers. Additionally the log has included many watches from Goring Ilex Trees (just 2.5 km west of Marine Gardens) from Frank Forbes and Dave Smith, and from Worthing Pier (just 2 km east of Marine Gardens) done by Roy Sandison and Paul Brayshaw. Innumerable observers have contributed to the log and all, I hope, have been duly acknowledged in each of the annual reports. At Brighton Marina there was flurry of activity in the 1980s when Nick Lord, John Shaunessey and Colin Brooks kept a regular note of observations. In more recent years intense and prolonged watching, coordinated by Ian Whitcomb, has produced many new county record totals. The incredible numbers of observations are matched by truly marathon watches and this site has now surpassed Worthing as the area's prime sea-watch location.

Cormorant - *Keith Noble*

The SDOS annual reports document watching between 1955 and 1964 and then annually since 1978. During the interim years there was clearly watching but records were not collected in a systematic way. There certainly was a band of watchers who gathered early on Spring mornings at Widewater. I recall many mornings cycling from my home in Downlands Avenue (Broadwater) to meet Mike Goddard there. We would perch, rather uncomfortably in a beach hut, without the permission of the owner, before cycling up to the Sanctuary. Watching was difficult, particularly as my only pair of optics was an ancient pair of pre-war binoculars which were not only out of alignment but required both eye pieces to be focused individually. I'm not sure if the situation improved when a kind relative brought me a new pair of "super and powerful" binoculars from a national newspaper advertisement. These, a pair of 20x45, were impossible to hold steady and it was quite an art to find the object I wanted to look at! At the time the ShDOS owned a "brass and glass" telescope which those present would take turns to use – lying on the back with the object lens supported by knees or feet – a long way from the clear prismatic telescopes and firm tripods of today. In the 1955 report Tony Marr wrote "*many birds remained unidentified, due mainly to long distances but also due to bad light and fleeting glimpses*", these

conditions certainly held for me in the 1960s and I doubt this has changed as we now ponder over birds seen through powerful telescopes at great ranges.

I wonder whether other things have changed! In the 1957 report there is an exciting description of a Pomarine Skua, a species which still generates excitement although now seen more frequently. In the same report Tony mentions large movements of tits, a group of species which is rarely recorded and certainly not in numbers to warrant the adjective large. Current sea-watching notes often include times of scarce birds or interesting flocks which may have been recorded at other sites; from this flight times can sometimes be determined. In 1958 Tony Marr and Roger Wilmshurst examined the results of this exercise whilst the two were watching at Widewater and the Shoreham Harbour arm respectively; a party of Scaup were travelling at 40 mph but a supercharged Curlew was flying at 120 mph!

Little Auk - *Keith Noble*

One aspect which certainly has not changed is the enjoyment of seeing exciting movements of birds. In most years one or two watches are easily recalled and in most instances they are remembered for the sheer numbers of birds seen. In recent years there have been some spectacular movements of auks in the winter, of hirundines in the autumn or of terns and waders in the spring but of the many years I have *gazed over the sparkling brine* there are three days for which I have particularly fond memories.

The end of 1978 saw most of Britain embraced in arctic weather conditions and on New Year's Eve a bitterly cold NE wind swept snow into Sussex. It was impossible to use the car so I walked the few hundred yards to the beach and watched from 1015 until 1130 am before severe cold forced me to return home to warm up. By mid afternoon I had

defrosted sufficiently to walk back to the deserted, snow-swept promenade for another 45 minutes. The cold weather movement of birds attempting to get away from the freezing conditions was most impressive. The visibility at times was grim as snow blew horizontally but between the showers flocks of birds appeared from all directions both over the coast and out at sea. Most were speeding westward and involved the usual species encountered in such an exodus. In the two hours there were over 3000 Skylarks, about 1700 Lapwings and smaller groups of Starlings and thrushes. Wildfowl included nearly 500 Wigeon, 200 Brent Geese, 95 Shelducks but a large mixture of species including 5 Scaup, 14 Goosanders and three parties of grey geese.

Goosanders – *John Reaney*

One group of 17 White-fronted Geese flew very low overhead all the time slowly heading inland. My notebook records "many thousands of gulls" along the tideline and waders, including 18 Knot and a Snipe, frantically feeding undisturbed on the sand and mud which, atypically for a weekend, was deserted. To put some icing on the day a Short-eared Owl and a superb male Hen Harrier drifted westward in the late afternoon. Although there have been other cold periods with impressive movements of birds none in the past decades have matched up to this. The severe blizzard conditions, the absence of cars speeding along the coastal road and the totally forsaken Worthing promenade added to the beauty of this watch.

On Saturday 7th April 1979 the Sussex Ornithological Society held its AGM in Brighton. There was much chatter in the pub after the meeting about that day's sea-watching and how the forecast for the morning was miserable with fresh SE winds. For the previous few years the day following this meeting had been particularly good for sea-watching and with this dubious statistic in mind all parted full of optimism. The drive home from Brighton confirmed the wind was blowing strongly from the south-east and throughout the night

the wind howled and whistled through one of the house drainpipes; one which used to "sing" if the wind was in this direction. On the morning of Sunday 8th April I somehow overslept! As I rushed out of the house in the rain a dark, broad winged raptor glided over my house and out of view before being identified. On arrival at the usual shelter near Marine Gardens at 0830 there was nobody else watching yet there was obviously a good passage underway. The rain made watching difficult but during spells when this ceased the grey conditions and clear air led to superb visibility. Everywhere I looked there were Common Scoters to be seen and by midday I had recorded over 140 flocks, some containing 300 birds, and a total of more than 4000 scoters. I believe 12,000 passed Beachy Head that morning and at Dungeness the total was somewhere between 24 and 27,000 birds. Often scoter parties form distant dots moving along the horizon but on 8th April most were close and several flocks comprised exclusively of jet-black males. At the time I had borrowed a Nickel Supra telescope but had failed to master this piece of gear; thankfully binoculars and a notebook were all I needed. Common Scoter, of course, was not the only species moving on that day and other wildfowl included several Velvet Scoters, in excess of 100 Red-breasted Mergansers and parties of Brent Geese were heading eastward and amongst the steady stream of Sandwich Terns there were Little Gulls and parties of Common Terns. Mark Welfare recorded the continuing passage during the afternoon but a watch between 0600 and 0800 on the following morning, despite the wind persisting to blow from the south-east, produced just six Common Scoter. The total number of Common Scoter recorded in 1979 was 5754, clearly a very high proportion were recorded on 8th April and only in 1989 have more Common Scoter been recorded when the year total of 6662 included, as the best day, 28th March 1989 when 1902 flew east.

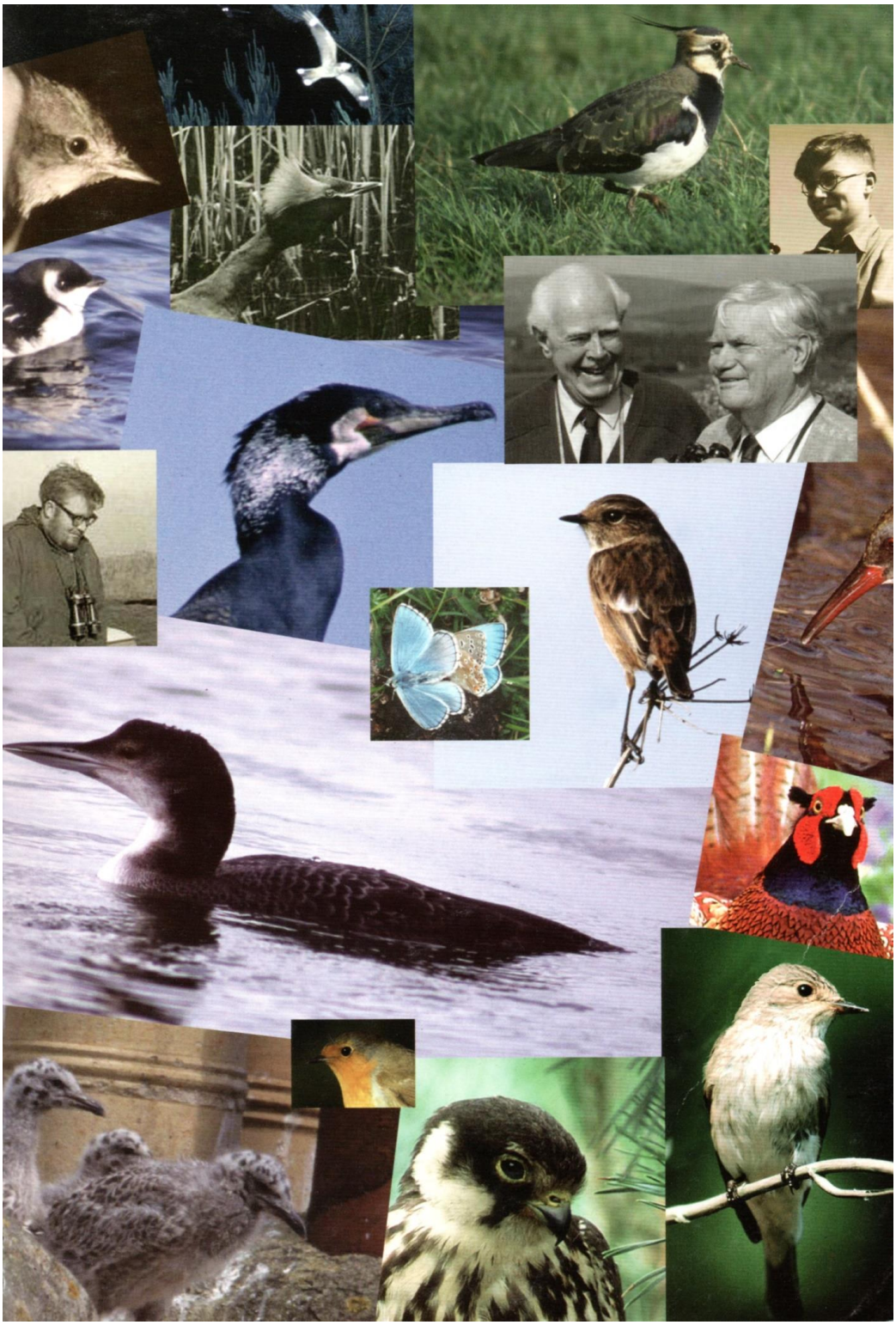
No essay on sea-watching in Sussex would be complete without further mention of that enigmatic and unpredictable species, the Pomarine Skua. My third day choice, and possibly the area's "best ever" sea-watch, occurred on 7th May 1981; a day known to many as "Pom Thursday". In contrast to the previous days described I shared this with many of the local observers and in total 13 hours of watching was logged by the team. Most, I expect, would have been delighted to watch all 13 hours. Mike Hall, in his report of the day published in the 1981 annual report, records how expectations were running high with an excellent forecast following a period of westerly winds and the knowledge that the 7th May historically had been a regular date when Pomarine Skuas had been recorded in the area. In the event nobody was disappointed. Early in the morning the shelter was full of observers, I believe Chris Fox and Brian Clay were amongst the first to arrive, and by the time I logged on they had recorded an excellent assortment of species. My late arrival meant I had to squeeze into the west end of the shelter and be content to wait to see birds as they were announced arriving from the west. However, in my first hour several Velvet Scoters, a party of Greenshanks, 22 Black Terns, a Roseate Tern and a few Little Gulls and skuas had accompanied a steady passage of other wildfowl, waders and terns. Just after 0800hrs one of the group, whose telescope was pointing towards Bognor, announced an approaching flock of skuas and sure enough a superb party of six "Poms", not too far offshore and in excellent light, paraded past for all to enjoy. For several of the assembled these were "lifers" and those who left soon after for work departed in the knowledge they had enjoyed a good watch.

I had, some weeks earlier, booked this day as annual leave ostensibly for my car to be serviced. I therefore had to leave the beach by 0900hrs but the garage was not far away and within thirty minutes I had returned by which time there were fewer observers but regular

parties of terns and waders were passing close along the tideline. I had also planned to spend lunch with Denise, my wife, and had previously booked a table at Gian Mario's, one of our favourite Italian restaurants in Worthing; imagine my surprise, and guarded delight, as we were ushered to a table in a first floor, bay window overlooking the sea! Lunch was most enjoyable but by mid-afternoon I was back in the shelter and enjoying the spectacle of the terns and waders, which were now passing very close to the shore. The afternoon offered an opportunity to take some photographs of passing birds and one of the pictures, of a Common Tern, taken at this time adorned the SDOS display board for many years. The numbers of observers grew again as offices and schools closed in the late afternoon but the passage continued right into the evening. Many retired to the local hostelry to celebrate and reflect over a superb day during which 21% of the birds recorded during the entire spring had been seen and included 50 Pomarine Skuas. In commemoration of such a memorable day Mike Hall commissioned a limited issue of "Pom" coffee mugs. A second edition porcelain was struck following the impressive afternoon movement of Pomarine Skuas on Monday May 14th 1984.

It only takes one rare and unusual sighting to turn a dull watch into one to remember. Recollections of such events include a Cory's Shearwater which Chris Fox and myself watched flying straight towards the beach before turning to the southwest during a severe gale on 3rd May 1981. Likewise on 17th October 1987 only four birds had been seen by Richard Bayne and myself before an adult Sabine's Gull flew along the high-tide line following a Little Gull. There was great excitement amongst the throng gathered at Marine Gardens on 7th May 2000 at the realisation that an egret, flying east with a party of Black-headed Gulls, was a Cattle Egret and not the expected Little Egret. Like all sea-watchers I have notes of birds seen too fleetingly to clinch an identification or seen too distantly to be sure of certain plumage characteristics; amongst these are included odd shearwaters and petrels, none more unusual than that described by Brian Short in May 1980. Like all sea-watchers I too never know what is going to turn up next; I'm still waiting for a close adult Long-tailed Skua to pass by and it is such dreams that keep me, like Wordsworth, *"gazing on the sparkling brine"*.

Pomarine Skuas – *John Reaney*



Fifty Years of Birdwatching

In 1953 at Shoreham-by-Sea in West Sussex a small group of people decided to start a society to watch and record birds. 50 years later this book is published celebrating the achievements of the Shoreham District Ornithological Society.

The book is an anthology including memories of the early days, stories of outings, special sightings, precise records from the three ringing sites in the area with records of the latest information. Original members have been traced and tell of the influence ornithology has had in their lives as a result of the encouragement and leadership of members in the 1950s and 1960s. Several of the contributors to the book are well known in the birding world today. Contributions include drawings and records from early notebooks, illustrations and photographs (colour and black and white). The book will be enjoyed by anyone with an interest in birds, as it is not confined to Shoreham-by-Sea, although this is where it all started for the Society.