

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

December 2004

Into Winter

We wish you a Merry Christmas

and hope that a joyful throng will join Santa at the Fort on December 28th.

Chris Wright has organised some fine talks and outings for the New Year. Our first speaker will be Chris Cockburn, RSPB Warden of Langstone Harbour. Although his talk will be primarily about Langstone and its breeding birds, this is also an opportunity for questions and comments about the Adur Estuary reserve, which Chris oversees as part of his duties, and wrote about in our last newsletter.

On February 8th, we will have a visit from John Eyre, who is Chairman of the Hampshire Ornithological Society. John's varied programme of talks includes some on special Hampshire subjects and on this occasion we have asked him to speak on Gilbert White's Birds. If you have read *The Natural History of Selborne* and visited *The Wakes*, you know you're in for a treat. If you haven't, come and find out why the book is so popular; it is said that more copies have been printed than of any work except the Bible.

Stephen Knapp will be returning to speak to us on March 8th. He last spoke to us in 1999 when the Reserva Ecologica de Guapi Assu (REGUA) was struggling to raise funds for its land purchase appeal. Stephen became its Project Director and last year the final and most important parcel of land was secured. Stephen's work on this project is now complete and we have asked him to tell us more about this major conservation success story. For a look at the wonderful wildlife and landscapes of this Atlantic Rainforest reserve in Brazil, visit www.regua.co.uk.

Time for Committee changes

We were very pleased to welcome Keith Noble on the Committee this year, particularly as he offered to edit the Newsletter, which, as you can see, he is doing admirably.

Jim Steedman and Peter Whitcomb have said they would like to stand down as Report Editor and Recorder respectively in the coming year. Penny Green has said she would like to become more involved in the SDOS and is willing to take over as Report Editor. Clive Hope has been helping Peter in writing up some species records and again is willing to take on the Recorder's role. We are most grateful to Penny and Clive and hope they will enjoy working their way into their duties during the year.

At the same time we acknowledge the immense amount of work put into the Reports for which they have been responsible by Jim and Peter. Jim has added several pages of information, including Tide Tables, the SDOS Map and Gazetteer, Useful Addresses and Websites, and Personal Checklist, which have increased the interest of the Reports. All the work done by the Committee demands a certain amount of dedication, Jim and Peter deserve our thanks for responsibilities carried out to the full.

Diane and Terry Hicks, though not standing down from the Committee, would like to hand over the preparation of the refreshments at Indoor Meetings to someone else. They have done this job cheerfully and efficiently for several years and we thank them for making our intervals at meetings a very pleasant break. We need two people to organise some food and drink to start in January

INDOOR MEETINGS

Meetings are held on Tuesdays at 7.30 p.m. in St. Peter's Church Hall, West Street, Shoreham.

January 11th

Langstone Harbour

Chris Cockburn, RSPB Warden

February 8th

Gilbert White's Birds

John Eyre

March 8th

Reserva Ecologica de Guapi Assu (REGUA)

Stephen Knapp

April 12th

AGM

& Members' contributions

FIELD OUTINGS

December 28th (Tue)

Stanley's Seasonal Saunter

AM only—meet 09.00 in Fort Haven car park. OS sheet 198. GR TQ233046. Leader Santa!

January 16th (Sun)

Dungeness area

Leader Bernie Forbes

February 19th (Sat)

Pagham Harbour

Leader Paul Stevens

March 12th (Sat)

Newhaven Tidemills

Leader Chris Wright

More details of 2005 outings in your new programme

2005. This is not a difficult task but one which helps to spread the load of things to be done at each meeting. There are always willing hands to help clear up at the end! Any offers, please, to Diane 01273 591120, or Brianne 01273 452497.

As we come to the end of 2004, I should like to thank all those on the Committee who have given so much of their time to make sure the SDOS continues to thrive and is an enjoyable Society for all our loyal members.

Brianne Reeve, *Chairman/Hon. Secretary*

What was about?

Here are a few snapshots from recent weeks. I have adapted some from emails to the SDOS Internet User Group, so this will not all be news to all readers, but I think these items are worth repeating in print. SDOS members who would like to join the User Group, should contact: terrance.hicks@talk21.com.

October 30th

At Shoreham Beach, the last day of British Summer Time dawned grey but turned warm and bright, bringing out butterflies—a few Red Admirals, two Clouded Yellows and a Peacock. Six Swallows flew East, perhaps bound for a shorter Channel crossing at Beachy Head, or hunting flies more successfully by heading into the gentle breeze. Wagtails and Pipits were catching small insects off the shingle and breakwaters, probably kelp flies that breed in the washed-up seaweed. Crows scavenged the tideline; one repeatedly dropped a shell onto the stones, and another hacked open a mermaid's purse and ate the fishy contents.

At least two hundred Greenfinches took off from their feeding on the seeds of sea kale when a Kestrel passed through. Some of them followed the hunter, just as the Starlings did later with a Sparrowhawk, removing the danger of being caught by surprise. Tinkling flocks of Goldfinches, mostly of about twenty birds, were coasting East at the rate of about three hundred per hour, and a hundred Wood Pigeons headed inland.

Turnstones and Sanderlings fed at the water's edge and I found a small high tide roost of Dunlins and Ringed Plovers. Their numbers will increase in the coming weeks, and walkers and their dogs can help them survive the winter by not disturbing them as they rest on the Beach.

Two Egrets waded in the shallows at Widewater. A Kingfisher flew from a tamarisk bush, a Dabchick ducked under and disappeared, a Black Redstart gave

only a glimpse, but a pair of Stonechats posed beautifully for my camera.

Keith Noble (*originally for Beach News*)



Stonechat

Keith Noble

November 6th

Although the weather forecast was rather indifferent, I thought I would have another shot at mist-netting at the Sanctuary. Pam Mears and I met at the copse at 7.00 and, as it turned out, we remained dry and had an interesting session.

The 47 birds of 13 species included only the second Cetti's Warbler to be trapped at the Sanctuary, (the other was a female ringed on 3/10/77 and retrapped on 7/10/77). Today's bird was a male, but, like the last, remained quiet and skulking. In the final net round I found a Firecrest—not really surprising seeing how many have been reported in SE England this autumn. Once again it was a good morning for Goldcrests (8), and three each of Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps were the highest November day totals for these species. Today's Blackbird total of 8 was the highest this year and all bar one were young males. The exception was an adult female weighing only 78g, the lightest November female recorded at the site.

Today's catch brought the total up to 1000 for the Sanctuary this year, (sadly neither the Cetti's nor the Firecrest had the honour of being number 1000).

John Newnham

November 7th

Phil, Val and I at Cissbury achieved what I think is a record catch for November of 76 birds, including 9 Goldcrests. Highlights were a Firecrest, a Redwing, a late Blackcap, and best of all a Woodcock, feeding along one of our paths and

flushed into the net. This is a Cissbury first, although I have a feeling that, back in the dim and distant, we had one at the Mumbles.

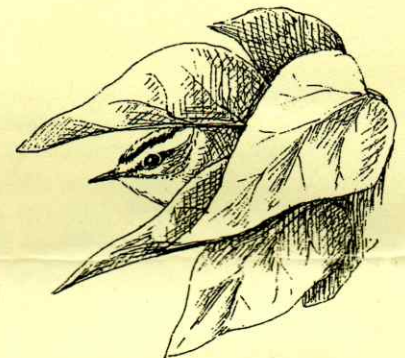
Brian Clay

November 27th

I spent 30 minutes sea-watching this morning from Marine Gardens, Worthing. There was no movement but the calm and grey conditions made for a good count of birds on the sea—1 Slavonian and 98 Great Crested Grebes, 1 Common Scoter, 147 Red-breasted Mergansers, and 15 Razorbills.

The tide was high and there was a large roost of waders tucked under the shingle ridges at Marine Gardens. The steep beach makes them invisible from the promenade and very difficult to count, but an estimate was 70 Grey Plovers, 50 Ringed Plovers, 30 Sanderlings, 400 Dunlins and 10 Turnstones.

John Newnham



Firecrest

Keith Noble

November 30th

First report from me, I have waited for something special to happen—10.50am two Sand Martins flew over my home in Lancing, followed by a Waxwing, which perched in a rowan tree.

Reg Bradbury, on the SOS website

Sales Department!

The Society has two products which may be of interest to members.

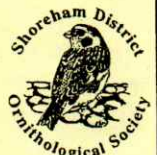
These are always available at indoor meetings and usually on outings.

1. SDOS Car Sticker — £1 or £1.20 by post.

2. "SDOS Golden Jubilee" ball-point pen.

Black ink. Black and white plastic pen with single commemorative inscription. Comfortable rubber grip. £1 or £1.25 by post.

John Maskell



Notices

SDOS subscriptions for 2005 are due on January 1st. The rates are unchanged: Single £10, Family £15, Junior £4, to the Hon. Treasurer, John Maskell, at 41 St. Lawrence Avenue, WORTHING, BN14 7JJ

Please send your remaining 2004 records for the annual **Shoreham Bird Report** to the Hon. Recorder, Peter Whitcomb, 99 Barnett Road, BRIGHTON, BN1 7GJ

The SDOS Anniversary Book

It could make a great Christmas present for someone you know - or for yourself.

'Fifty Years of Birdwatching' costs £15 plus £2.50 p&p from Terry Hicks, 7 Berberis Court, SHOREHAM BN43 6JA, phone 01273 591120.

Storks at Het Zwin

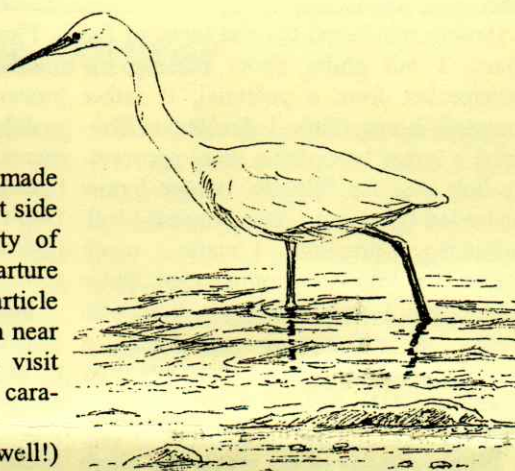
Early in 2004, my wife and I made plans to travel to Rossum on the east side of the Netherlands to meet a party of friends. Two weeks before our departure in late July, I read a magazine article about a bird reserve called Het Zwin near Knokke-Heist, and we decided to visit Het Zwin on the way in our motor caravan.

We took the auto route (free as well!) from Calais, past the coastal resorts of Flanders as far as Ostende, then wended our way on local roads past Zeebrugge and Knokke-Heist to a camp site. Very posh at Sande Platz, each pitch had its own shower and loo, what luxury! We were just in the Netherlands, but the cows over the fence were in Flanders.

Next morning we set off on our bikes on the 15 minute journey to the Zwin reserve. It was in two parts. The first resembled a zoo and contained a lot of the birds we prefer to see flying. However there were a number of injured birds, so the place acted as a hospital as well. We were impressed by the cleanliness, with running water through some enclosures and shallow pools for waders. Netted areas held an injured Gannet, various waders, a Spoonbill and a Night Heron. Swans and ducks were in the open areas, and there was a good range of owls and raptors in large cages. There were storks' nests everywhere, on trees, poles and chimney-stacks.

We moved on to the open part of the reserve. Although nowhere is really high in this part of the World, we emerged at a point high enough to look over a series of lagoons to the bank of a high dyke on the

far side. Beyond this was the sea. Having our picnic lunch on a seat overlooking the viewpoint, we were soon accosted by one of the White Storks. Quite tame, he strutted around us, clattering his beak at intervals. Mid summer is probably not the best time to visit coastal sites like this, but we saw White Storks flying, Egrets, Whimbrel, Curlew, Oystercatcher and Brent and Grey Lag Geese.



Little Egret

Keith Noble

After lunch we crossed the sandy floor of the reserve past great mats of vivid sea lavender, and up onto the protective coastal dunes for a view of the tranquil sea. It was now nearly three o'clock, feeding time, so we hurried back to the Storks' gathering ground. They had all descended from their lofty nests and were jostling for the afternoon hand-out. We found the sound of their clattering beaks quite delightful. We said wistfully how lovely it would be to see them in the Adur valley, but apart from the odd stray we realise this is unlikely to happen.

One of our lasting memories of the area was to see cars having to give way to bicycles, and we had many a laugh over this. It was now time for us to move on, but strangely I then found written in pencil on the map to the East of Meppel the word 'STORKS' - but that's another story.

John Ford

(Het Zwin is also a major site for wild geese in winter, and could be fitted into a Eurostar break to the wonderful medieval city of Bruges. John has written more about Storks for use in a future issue.)

Tales out of School 9 A Dot on the Horizon

Since my last contribution to this self-induced series, I have attained my half century and, like many at this watershed, have examined my life style. By chance the opportunity of working part-time arose and it didn't take too much deliberation before I seized the opportunity. So in September my weekend became two and a half days longer! Suddenly there was more time for birding!

I have found myself taking a much greater interest in sightings posted on various websites and in mid-September a Peter Whitcomb note to the SDOS Internet User Group sent Shena and me to the Castle Hill area in search of a Pallid Harrier. The bird appeared to have flown but the discovery of this delightful stretch of the Downs, just East of Brighton, more than compensated for the disappointment.

A week later on September 21st, we decided to return to Castle Hill. At 3pm we were just about to set off when an inner voice said 'check your e-mails'. A note again from Peter—Dotterel at Kithurst Hill. Some readers will recall the lengths Shena and I went to in order to see our first examples in Hungary last year....and here was one apparently on our doorstep!

Shena says she has never seen anyone move so fast and within twenty minutes we were tumbling out of the car at the summit of Kithurst. Our excitement was tempered by the thought that our twitches usually 'end in tears'. We all know the comments: "It was showing well until 10 minutes ago"; "Flew off West just now"; "Taken by a Sparrowhawk", etc. Three birders viewed us through their binoculars from the top of the ridge and we returned the compliment—familiar faces!

Initially the juvenile Dotterel skulked behind a ploughed furrow but over the course of the next three hours we were royally entertained. Interestingly, a Golden Plover was also present and gave the opportunity for comparison within the same telescope view. Thanks to the wonders of the mobile phone we were able to spread the news further to some people who hadn't yet read their e-mails.

A magical afternoon which would not have been possible had I still been fully employed at the chalk face.

John Maskell

Bird Table Notes

First came a male on November 6th, then two males and a female together on 10th. They have appeared singly



since then, but I think that there is more than one female as the crowns seem different shades of tan. The birds that remind me of shoe polish, Blackcaps, have arrived early in my garden this autumn and found a new sort of food. A few years ago we planted a small Cordyline cabbage palm as a feature to be viewed through an arch. It has now grown taller than the arch and flowered for the first time. The big spherical spray of small white flowers was popular with bees. Now the flowers have turned to greeny-white berries. Sometimes Starlings tuck in vigorously, but the Blackcaps are more secretive, popping out from the crown of long strap-shaped leaves. So far, they have shown little interest in their usual favourite food, the apples which I hang in the trees on wire hooks. In other people's gardens, I gather that they eat honeysuckle berries in Autumn and ivy in Spring, peanuts, fat, mealworms, and raisins, and visit the yellow blooms of Mahonia. Graham Roberts has written in the Hampshire Bird Report 1995 about the many Blackcaps which he has colour-ringed and studied in his Cosham garden, where they love home made sponge cake.

Ringed recoveries indicate that the Blackcaps which winter in England are not the same as those that nest here. They come instead from the Continent, including the Low Countries and Germany, and their numbers are growing.

Keith Noble

Are they in your garden this winter?

Barrie Watson, wearing his BTO hat, is promoting a new national survey of Blackcaps and other wintering warblers and 'crests'. It runs until March 31st and everyone is encouraged to submit observations, with a special effort over the Christmas and New Year period. The instructions and a recording form are at www.bto.org/birdtrack/

You could also contribute other bird lists to Birdtrack, so that the BTO and RSPB can add them to the sum of knowledge which supports bird conservation.

A tale of four nest boxes

Early in the year I positioned the usual three nest boxes on their familiar willow and alder trees. Very soon they were being actively inspected by the local Blue and Great Tits. However, after several days, I noticed the outlines of the holes were becoming markedly jagged, and soon discovered the culprit—a Great Spotted Woodpecker. He had obviously decided that these ready made homes were worth inspecting.

Some days later I was in the RSPB shop at Pulborough and found I could purchase metal hole covers to fix to nest boxes to deter such 'wanton' behaviour. I bought plates of various sizes, 28mm for Great Tits, 25mm for blue tits and another even smaller.

Having reinforced the entrances of the boxes, I felt guilty about barring the woodpecker from a potential, if rather cramped, home. Thus I decided to construct a larger box with a more appropriate hole size for 'Woody', whom I now envisaged bearing a rather crumpled bill. Following instructions, I made a much deeper box with the recommended 50mm hole. Then I duly filled the box with blocks of polystyrene—apparently it gives the bird something to excavate. Presumably it then feels it is a true 'home maker'.

Within one day of my precarious climb up a ladder resting against a silver birch to fix the box, the woodpecker discovered it. Soon, the surrounding area was covered with tiny pieces of polystyrene—a result!

Unfortunately, despite the initial euphoria, the bird disappeared within a few days to be replaced by a pair of starlings. Whether he found a better site or was ousted by the starlings, I do not know. However, it was nice to know that the box was used, as indeed were the other three, one by Great and two by Blue Tits. To one of the boxes I had fitted a hole plate of slightly smaller size than recommended for Blue Tits, but this did not deter them and I watched them as they squeezed in and out, leaving like corks released from bottles.

It was good to have all four boxes used successfully and I will try again next year and maybe the 'Woody' will stay.

Martin Ford

If any more members would like to contribute weekly counts to the SDOS Garden Bird Survey, please ask for a form from Martin Ford, 29 Foam Court Waye, FERRING, BN12 5RD.

Ecotours 2005

Following the November indoor meeting, SDOS members have shown great interest in Ecotours Holidays. So if you would like itineraries, and bird highlights of any of our holidays to see birds, bears, butterflies and lots more in Hungary, Slovakia, and the Danube Delta, please email me ecotours@tiscali.co.uk or telephone me on 01903 200584.

Balazs Szigeti, Ecotours Director and Guide from Hungary would like to thank SDOS members for your warm reception. He very much enjoyed sea-watching, a rare event for a Hungarian birder!

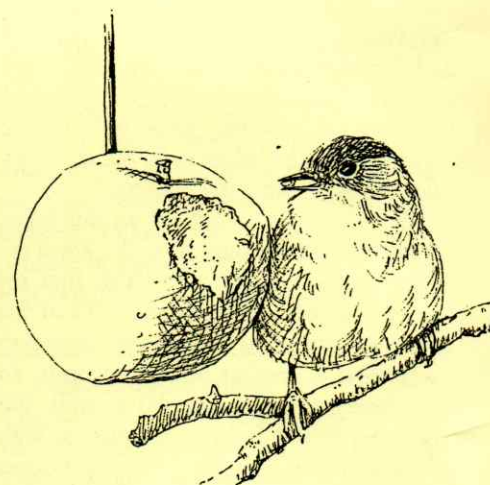
Shena Maskell

AGM on April 12th

Please give advance notice of any questions, as this helps the Committee to prepare better answers.

After the AGM come the entertainments. Audrey Wende is preparing a light-hearted quiz, 'Audrey's Teasers'. Don't worry, it won't be The Weakest Link and I can't imagine Audrey using the scowl and sneer.

Then it's over to you, the members. You can have up to 10 minutes of fame, to show and tell us about your birding interests. Please think now about what you could contribute to enthrall your friends.



Blackcap

Keith Noble

Items for next newsletter to the Editor, Keith Noble,
19 Roman Road,
STEYNING,
BN44 3FN,
Email: noble@karg.freemove.co.uk
by March 24th, please.