

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

September 2005

John, Paul and Dylan

With the approach of Autumn, thoughts turn to the resumption of our indoor meetings at St. Peter's Church Hall. Our star trio of speakers offers us great birding in conditions of extreme contrast—from peat bogs to Arabian sands.

Dylan Walker, best-known for 'Talking Whales', will be showing us why the Bay of Biscay is one of the most breathtaking places in Europe to watch wildlife. His tales of dolphins and shearwaters from the ferries will be a special treat for sea-watchers on October 4th.

Paul Stevens, local photographer and lecturer, will be talking on November 8th about the birds and other wildlife of the Western Isles. The Hebrides are more water than land, with fine flocks of wild-fowl, waders nesting among the flowers of the machair, and eagles in the hills.

To end the year, we have a return visit from one of the very best, John Wyatt on December 6th. This time his talk is about Oman, a country of vast deserts, but also mountains and a fertile coastline with many migrant birds.

Outings for the remainder of the year start with Chris Wright leading a walk across the Downs from the Washington Bostal on October 1st; hips and haws, Old Man's Beard, and migrants on the move.

On November 12th, we travel further afield to Shellness on the Isle of Sheppey, tiring perhaps, but usually a rewarding day with flocks of waders and a good chance of harriers and other birds of prey.

Bernie Forbes will be birding in the Arun Valley on November 20th, while Keith Noble offers something similar up the Adur from Bramber on December 3rd. Possible sightings include Bewick's

Swans, a variety of ducks, and Short-eared Owls—but no promises!

Finally, come and meet your Committee members for our seasonal get-together at Fort Haven on Shoreham Beach on December 31st, starting at 9.00 for the morning only.

All these outings and meetings, organised by Chris Wright, are in your programme, but if you have lost yours, please ask Brianne for a replacement.



Short-eared Owl

Keith Noble

Spring & Summer Sightings

The Spring seawatching from Worthing really got going back on March 21st with 194 Brent Geese, 44 Sandwich Terns, 119 Common Scoters, 12 Eiders and an assortment of other ducks, as well as an Avocet (only 5 this Spring), two Black-necked Grebes and two Med Gulls in the first couple of hours. The first Common Tern was seen on April 1st, rather early, and a Swallow on 2nd. There was a good movement on 3rd with 800 Brents and 200 Scoters. The month had quiet periods but from about 17th to 26th good numbers of Arctic and Great Skuas all passed East.

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INDOOR MEETINGS

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

October 4

Baywatch with Dylan Walker

November 8

Wildlife in the Western Isles with Paul Stevens

December 6

Oman—the Continental Connection with John Wyatt

FIELD OUTINGS

Oct 1 (Sat)

Washington

Meet 09.00 in Washington Bostal car park OS 198, GR TQ 121120. Leader Chris Wright

Nov 12 (Sat)

Shellness

Meet 09.30 at start of bumpy road to NNR car park. OS 178, GR TR 046693. Leader Chris Wright

Nov 20 (Sun)

Arun Valley

Meet 09.30 in Greatham Bridge car park OS 197, GR TQ 032163. Leader Bernie Forbes

Dec 3 (Sat)

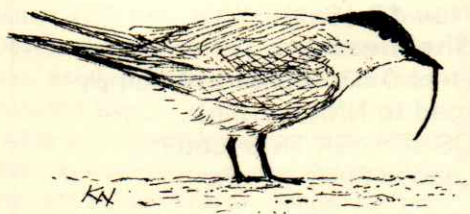
Bramber & Beeding

Meet 09.30 in Bramber Village car park OS 198, GR TQ 189106. Leader Keith Noble

Spring, continued

THE BIG DAY was May 2nd when a succession of watchers logged 2000 Commic Terns (about half the Spring total), 10 Arctic, 8 Great and 15 Pomarine Skuas, 6 Garganey and sundry other species. Next day there were 9 Poms past the Marina, and more were seen on 13th when three landed on the sea off Worthing and remained for 40 minutes before resuming their easterly journey, making a total of 22 for the Spring here. The totals of Arctic and Great Skuas logged from the watchpoint were 62 and 32 respectively. Six Manx Shearwaters were seen in May and small numbers of Black Terns. A Manx Shearwater and another Pom were off Brighton Pier on 19th.

Away from the coast, a Red Kite was seen at Sussex University on May 1st, a Hoopoe was at Henfield Brooks with a pair of Garganey on 2nd and a Red Kite at Fulking on 7th. A Honey Buzzard passed over Southwick on 8th, with another Red Kite over Henfield Brooks the same day. On 23rd a Wryneck was found at Woods Mill and yet two more Kites near there on 31st. One of the star birds of the Spring was the Gull-billed Tern found first at Widewater on about 25th but later rediscovered on the Adur where it remained until June 8th. This proved to be a most obliging and interesting individual, mostly seen feeding on ragworms pulled from the Adur mud.



Gull-billed Tern

Keith Noble

We had hardly got over that when amazingly two fabulous Bee-eaters were found in gardens behind Raven Road in Shoreham at the end of May. They didn't linger long and were gone on June 2nd to Titchfield Haven, and since news has been published of a pair nesting in Herefordshire it makes one wonder if these were the same. While they were here, one was seen feeding the other!

More mundane but still somewhat surprising was the presence of 8 Great Crested Grebes still on the sea on June 6th with 34 Sanderlings on the beach at Goring. On 8th, 3 Red Kites, 3 Buzzards and a Kestrel were watched following hay-making at Wyckham Dale, north of Steyning, and 3 Crossbills paid a brief visit to the Recorder's Storrington garden. One had been seen a little earlier on a Goring TV mast! The 12th brought a fleeting visit of a Common Rosefinch to Goring Gap, since when it's been rather quiet—apart from the Quails on Steep Down, that is.

In my part of the World at Storrington, it seems to have been a fair breeding season. My two nest boxes were used successfully by one pair of Blue Tits, and one pair of Great Tits with a brood of 5. There have been several Blackbird broods in the garden through the Summer and Song Thrushes nested but young were not seen. Greenfinches produced three young, Goldfinches two, and Nuthatches, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers one, with several young Dunnocks and Robins to add testimony to a reasonable Summer. No doubt the ringers will have their views from a different perspective.

Clive Hope, Hon. Recorder

Recorder's Notes

Please submit your sightings regularly, with particular attention to this list of species for which we require more information. All breeding records are useful—nest box successes, Swallows in your garage, etc.

Little Grebe—all records away from Brooklands and Widewater

Great Crested Grebe—any inland sightings

Grey Partridge—all records

Oystercatcher in Summer, June to August

Snipe, especially from April to October
All records of Woodcock, Turtle Dove, Cuckoo, all Owl species, Nightjar, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Mistle Thrush, Bullfinch

Breeding records of Swallow, House and Sand Martins

Counts of Swifts

Pied Wagtail roosts in Autumn/Winter

Song Thrush breeding records

Reed Bunting in breeding season.

When you receive your Annual Report for 2004, you will notice that the order of the birds in the systematic list has been changed. This is because the data used to compile the Report is primarily derived from the Sussex Ornithological Society database which John Newnham manages

on their behalf. The new order has been adopted by the SOS to conform with what is now in use by the BOU and BTO. This means, for example, the Mute Swan is first on the list and waterfowl precede herons and seabirds. The numbering associated with the 'old' order has also consequently been removed, so for the time being no numbers will appear before each species.

Another change that has not been carried out this year for our Report but has been initiated by the SOS is the renaming of many of our birds. This has again been done to fall in line with BOU/British Birds recommendations. This is not going to be universally popular and we felt it worthwhile to publish the proposed list in the next newsletter to give members a foretaste of what might be to come! As a couple of examples, the word 'Eurasian' would appear before several species and 'Common' or 'Northern' before others, so we have Eurasian Wigeon and Common Nightingale.

Finally, we have agreed to allow our non-classified, (classified being confidential), records to be deposited with the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre so that they are available to a wide range of conservation bodies.

Hon. Recorder

Clive Hope

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Sales Department!

These are available at indoor meetings and usually on outings.

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

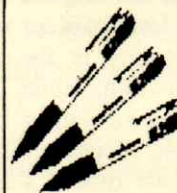
2. "SDOS Golden Jubilee" ball-point pen. Black ink. Black and white plastic pen with single commemorative inscription. Comfortable grip.

£.1 or £1.25 by post.

John Maskell

'Fifty Years of Birdwatching', the

SDOS anniversary book, costs £12.50, plus £2.50 p&p, from Terry Hicks, 7 Berberis Court, Shoreham, BN43 6JA. Phone 01273 591120.



The Telephone Tree

In the last Newsletter there was an enclosure inviting members to join the telephone tree so that everyone could be up to date with interesting new sightings. This followed a rash of delights which came into our area; the Great Spotted Cuckoo, two Bee-eaters and the Gull-billed Tern in the Spring. We have now set up the tree so that each person will have the responsibility of ringing one or two other people to pass on the news.

At the top of the tree are Bernie and Chris to whom sightings should be sent, and those who have chosen to be on the tree list can be informed. We know that many members keep in touch via our email user group, but the tree is intended to help those who do not use a computer and of course the telephone may be a faster contact.

If you would like your name added to the tree, please ring or email Brianne: 01273 452497

briannereeve@yahoo.com

E-mail Housekeeping

Clear as Mud? Are your e-mails bouncing?

Some members of the SDOS user group are not getting their e-mails properly. This may be because the e-mails from the user group are bouncing.

A bounce, or bounce-back, is an e-mail which is returned because it cannot be delivered for some reason. The people concerned may also be getting bounces from their personal e-mail programme, when they send an e-mail and receive a response saying it was undeliverable.

There are two kinds of e-mail bounces: a **hard bounce** is an e-mail message which has been returned to you because the recipient's address is invalid. A hard bounce might occur because the domain name doesn't exist, the recipient is unknown, or there is some type of network problem at the recipient's end;

a **soft bounce** is an e-mail message which gets as far as the recipient's mail server, but is bounced back before it reaches the recipient. One of the most common causes of a soft bounce is a full mailbox. This will happen a lot to subscribers who use free services such as Yahoo and Hot-Mail, because they allow for very little e-mail storage.

Please ensure your mailbox is not full, and if you are still not receiving the user group e-mails, contact terrance.hicks@talk21.com to get registered into the group again.

Whenever bouncing has occurred, I send e-mails from the SDOS user group to en-

able reregistration to take place automatically, but if this is not answered registration is ceased by Yahoo.

Reregistration may also be necessary if e-mails cannot get through to the user group from members. If this is the case, please e-mail terrance.hicks@talk21.com to be removed and then reregistered into the group.

Terry Hicks, IT Consultant

Kazakhstan Report May 6-18, 2005

There are some decisions which may seem unfortunate at the time, but which can later be seen to be the opposite.

I have a fascination with larks, more a simple desire to see as many different species as possible. Larks are the 'little brown jobs' which are picked up as one looks for the more glamorous species. I'd quite happily set out to see all the larks in the world if I could hope to keep pace with the 'splitters'.

I delayed one day too long in going to Anglesey for the infamous, highly restricted Black Lark which amazingly turned up at South Stack. This is a bird of the Russian Steppes, with a wintering area close to the Caspian Sea and a breeding area restricted to Central Kazakhstan. Unfavourable reports dissuaded me from making the overnight trip to Anglesey, which in the event would have been successful.

But what is 'success'? I'd have ticked the bird off, seen a solitary Black Lark which could well have been a ship-assisted visitor, thousand of miles from its home. And I'd still be missing the similarly restricted and desirable White-winged Lark.

So from that missed opportunity came the determination to go one better and see the birds on their breeding grounds in Kazakhstan—and while there I'd add White-winged and Bimaculated Larks for good measure.

Kazakhstan offers dramatic scenery, beautiful mountains, (even when smothered by a blizzard), birds difficult to see anywhere else, and possibly the most out-of-place capital city on Earth. What it definitely does not offer is luxury four-star hotels, not for the birder at any rate. In fact, it rarely reaches 'good' standard and 'basic' tends to flatter in one area. Several tour companies offer Kazakhstan but not all go to the Kurgalgin Nature Reserve area near Astana, so not all target Black Lark (or the less-than-basic accommodation).

The Rackstraw family signed up for a Birdseekers tour, which turned out to be

seven participants plus a UK guide and a local expert in birds and the Russian language. With three Rackstraws and a friend, we made up over half the paying guests. The local guide was the excellent Svetlana Annenkova, one of the topmost ornithologists in Kazakhstan.

We met with 1000-plus Red-necked Phalaropes on one lake, many thousands of migrating Ruffs, more Yellow Wag-tails of mixed races than I could describe, some difficult and key species, and the majority of the world population of mosquitoes. The Sociable Plover was good too, bearing in mind its endangered status.



Sociable Plover

Keith Noble

We were based at a recently completed 'hotel' in Almaty, to which we returned every two or so days between excursions, and where the showers were a delight even if we had to reach the hotel by driving across a muddy field following the collapse of the normal access road. We were the first paying guests at the hotel and almost the only guests during our 11-day on-off stay, which meant we could leave our excess baggage in our rooms every time we went off.

The hotel was minimally furnished but spacious and very comfortable, certainly the 'good' standard hotel of the trip, and the young ladies who looked after our meals were a delight.

None of our birding was actually done in Almaty, apart from a couple of waders on the hotel lake. Our first trip was to the Taukum Desert and the Sorbulak lakes, where we spent two nights in yurts—wooden framed circular tents. Comfortable but basic would sum them up, not quite so comfortable with the heavy downpour that came on the second night and resulted in reorganising of beds to avoid the drips. But this section of the

Bird Table Notes



Wanted, your items for this column. I suspect that most of our members have gardens, feed the birds, and gain a lot of pleasure from watching them. So, please share your observations here and write to the Editor by November 21st.

Kazakhstan, continued

trip got us started on new species — Demoiselle Crane, Dalmatian Pelican, MacQueen's Bustard and Bimaculated Lark — and the splits that are a feature of this part of Asia — Steppe Grey Shrike, Caspian Gull, Desert Lesser Whitethroat. It was on this section of the tour that our two minibuses, parked alongside each other off road with lunch expertly laid out on picnic tables between them, were 'attacked' by a flock of about 100 Rosy Starlings, which, it transpired, had been spooked by a hunting sparrowhawk and were flying off in panic. One actually took a route through the open front and rear doors of the bus.

The long journey back to Almaty took in the Turanga forest of the Ili river region, where White-winged Woodpecker, Turkestan Tit, and the dove with eight names, (I'll settle for Yellow-eyed Stock Dove), were specialities. Saxaul Sparrow was another eagerly sought-after bird from this area.

After a comfortable shower in the 'Mud Huts' as our base hotel was christened, it was off to the Charyn Gorges for two days and a night. This gave us a brief encounter with Pallas's Sandgrouse, a more satisfying look at Saker, and the memorable incident when our UK guide reprimanded one of the group who asked for identification of a commonly seen bird, a Black Kite. "Look at the tail" he told the offender. The bird flew overhead where its identity was confirmed as a Booted Eagle. "Look at the tail" became as much a part of the trip as the daily rendition of "Show me the way to Amarillo" on our

leader's CD player.

The Charyn Gorges also allowed us a night in Chilik, a town which seemed to owe its origins to the departed Russians, and a hotel which didn't really need to be there. Our room was adequate, the beds were comfortable as always, but Reception was something to behold — or not as it didn't exist as such. Still, the facilities worked so what more could we ask? We even added Greenfinch and Collared Dove to our trip list.

Back to Almaty for a night and then an early start for the short but interesting journey up into the Tien Shan mountains and their specialities. Brown Dipper was secured within minutes of leaving the city limits, then as we climbed, the local race of Merlin, excellent views of Blue Whistling Thrush and the first of three target redstarts, Blue-capped. The short stop for this bird added two others, Black-throated Accentor and one of the most attractive birds of the trip, the noisy but diminutive Red-fronted Serin.

Finally we reached our accommodation, the decidedly basic Observatory Hotel, with good food, comfortable beds, shared and basic facilities, and snow, lots of snow. We arrived just in time, unlike Naturetrek, as we managed views of the normally common Himalayan Rubythroat and distant Himalayan Snowcock before the weather closed in and for the next two days we were enveloped in a blanket of snow and decidedly poor visibility. We did, however, miss two other key birds because of the weather and had reason to be extremely grateful to Naturetrek for allowing us seats in their high wheelbase mountain bus. Our lightweight minibuses would have stood no chance of reaching the higher observatory we needed to visit for one of our main targets. Even with this impressive vehicle and its more impressive driver, we struggled up the hairpins and snow drifts, but the reward was waiting—at least three Guldenstadt's Redstarts around the buildings, where these beautiful birds contrasted with the abandoned vehicles and scrap metal left from the Russian occupation. Ibisbill, and our third redstart, Eversmann's or Rufous Backed, were added before we returned to Almaty, pausing on the way down for good views of Wallcreeper on the dam.

After showers at the Mud Huts, we were off to Astana and the Black Lark Extension. We'd already seen White-winged Lark, which has taken to breeding in the Taukum Desert, so that trip to Anglesey was looking a good one to miss. The lark extension would have been somewhat devalued if we were no longer looking for

either of the two specialities. Still, Kurgalgin had more than just the larks. The accommodation was memorable, or difficult depending on your view. The beds were comfortable, the garden sheds, or chalets, that housed them were adequate, and even included a working fridge, although we only had bottled water to put in it. That was ironic because one thing this place didn't have was water, beyond a dribble from a single outdoor tap. The water lorry had not turned up to supply the luxury showers, and presumably flush the toilets which were holes in the ground in triangular wooden outhouses.

But the food was excellent and the birding superb, as it should have been with the amount of winged food, mosquitoes, on offer. Highlights were many, including the two larks at close range, Pallas's Gull (formerly Great Black-headed), White-headed Duck, Black-winged Pratincole, and the biggest flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes, Yellow Wagtails and Ruffs I'm ever likely to see. Add one roadside view of the endangered Sociable Plover on its only known breeding grounds and you have an unbeatable bird spectacle.

I shouldn't omit to mention Astana. It's the new capital of Kazakhstan, replacing Almaty, supposedly because it is considered preferable to have your main city in the middle of the country less vulnerable to attack. Mind you, I can't see many invading armies swarming down from the Tien Shan mountains. Anyway, the President decided he wanted to leave his mark and organised construction of the new capital almost from scratch. Apparently it is now as expensive as London for property, and you get an ultra-modern building with any roof colour you like — pink, blue, red, purple. The official buildings match anything you could see in, for instance, Toronto; spanking new high-rise blocks, gold-trimmed white mosques, and some pleasant parks. There's a little concern about building high-rise on sand, but time will tell.

After a final night in the Mud Huts came a tearful farewell to our 'Russian dolls', Yelena and Anna, and we were heading back to London, looking forward to home comforts but undeniably impressed with the ornithological richness of the ninth largest country in the World.

Trevor Rackstraw

Please send items for the next Newsletter by November 21st to the Editor:

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