

# SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Winter  
2006/7

## NEWSLETTER

### In and Out

For a couple of hours, swap mid-winter Shoreham for long luminous summer days in Scotland. Ardnamurchan is the westernmost point in Britain, famous, like the isle of Tiree, for vast white beaches. Hundreds of waders and terns nest on the flowery machair. There are otters and seals, eagles and harriers, and we can be sure that David Lang will show us some lovely orchids.

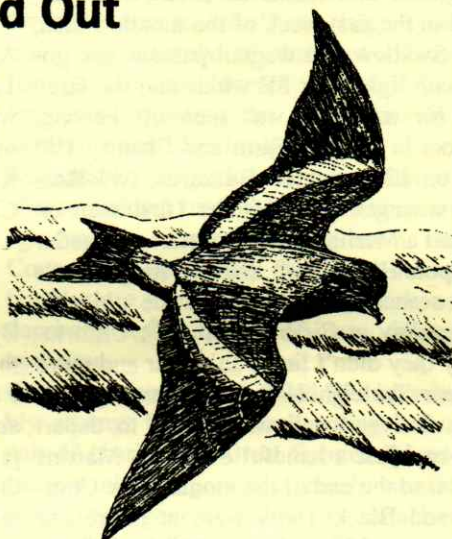
A few of our dedicated seawatchers may have seen all of Britain's breeding seabirds from Worthing or the Marina, but only in passing. Dave Hassell will show us the wonderful wild places where they nest in colonies of global importance.

Ralph Todd leads birdwatching holidays to many parts of the World with his wife Brenda, and this talk takes us to Iceland and the Pyrenees. Ralph and Brenda received the RSPB President's Award for outstanding support with Groups in Kent, at Operation Osprey, and on Council.

After the AGM, our own John and Shena Maskell will present more of their wildlife adventures in eastern Europe

Our first walk of the New Year takes in the Henfield Levels. If conditions are right we could see swans, geese, ducks and waders, and I hope that the local Peregrines will put in an appearance. We shall be on the flat but some of the way could be quite muddy. The new Programme shows the distance and degree of difficulty for each outing.

Dungeness offers wildfowl including Smew and wild swans, harriers and owls, perhaps a Bittern, a diver or one of the rarer grebes. The huge shingle Reserve has good facilities, trails and hides—you can find out more from the RSPB web-site. Wrap up warm.



*Leach's Petrel*

*Richard Ives*

Clive Hope has watched Ferring for many years and recently moved to make it his home patch. The area of beach, woodland strip and fields is noted for its high-tide roost of waders and gulls.

Following a successful December visit reported overleaf, we return to East Head is a great place to see all the waterbirds which make Chichester Harbour a key wetland site. 'Best Birdwatching Sites in Sussex', (Christmas present idea?), reckons the chances of seeing Little Stint, Spotted Redshank and Ruff are fifty per cent or better.

**And we have a late extra.** Bernie Forbes will lead an Arun Valley outing on Friday 22 December, meeting at Greatham Bridge at 13.00, or Rackham school at 15.00. The plan is to spend much of the time at a viewpoint to watch until dusk for Hen Harriers and owls. As well as waterproof clothes and boots, you might like to bring a thermos and a chair.

*Keith Noble, Newsletter Editor*

### INDOOR MEETINGS

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

**Jan 9**

**Tiree and Ardnamurchan**  
with David Lang

**Feb 13**

**British Seabirds**  
with Dave Hassell

**March 13**

**Where the Waters Roar and the Vultures Soar**  
with Ralph Todd

**April 24**

**AGM, and Eastern Promises**  
With John and Shena Maskell

### FIELD OUTINGS

**Jan 7 (Sun)**

**Adur Valley**

Meet 09.30 in Sussex Wildlife Trust car park at Woods Mill OS 198, GR TQ 218 138.

Leader Keith Noble

**Jan 14 (Sun)**

**Dungeness**

Meet 09.30 in Old Lighthouse car park, bring RSPB member cards OS 189, GR TQ 070125.

Leader Dave Smith

**Feb 4 (Sun)**

**Ferring (half-day)**

Meet 09.00 at end of Sea Lane OS 198, TQ 100016.

Leader Clive Hope

**March 3 (Sat)**

**East Head**

Meet 09.30 in East Head car park (charge) OS 197, GR SZ 765984.  
Leader Paul Stevens



## East Head Outing

If you woke up to the sound of pouring rain and heavy winds on 2 December you might have been forgiven for not making your way to East Head but it would have been a mistake, because it turned out to be a good day for birders. Eighteen members met at 9.30 and sat in their cars while a very heavy shower unleashed itself as the last of the bad weather for the day. Bernie announced that the Black Brant had already been seen among the huge flock of Brent which we had passed on the way to the car park. We set off to walk out to the point and round the Head, coming back on the seaward side. We had views of Oystercatchers, Great Crested Grebe, Redshank and Little Egret feeding in the low water. Small flocks of Ringed Plovers and Dunlin could be seen ahead of us, and Bernie and Dave Smith picked out a Little Stint.

We stood for some while out of the wind and scanning the variety of birds moving about as the tide fell. Mergansers were joined by a Red-throated Diver. A Curlew flew across calling. Two Knot and a Sanderling were with a group of Golden Plovers, and a few Grey Plovers useful for comparison. They even obliged by rising up and flying round us to show off their distinguishing black 'arm-pits'. There were several small parties of Reed Buntings, Meadow Pipits and more Skylarks. We were expecting to see a raptor as the birds were quite flighty but the only possibility turned out to be a Heron.

Rounding the point, we started back towards the car park, the tide falling fast and the sun out with some warmth. We added another thirty Sanderling, Common and Mediterranean Gulls, and a few Cormorants. Back at the car park we were delighted to see Audrey and Maurice Wende. Audrey has been very restricted recently following a foot operation, but she is always cheerful and used her wheelchair at a cracking pace to go and see the Black Brant which showed very well when you could pick it out moving between the Brent Geese. Everyone did see it eventually, with helpful comments like 'It's now third from the left...by the post...well, come down from the red van, go right...oh it's gone behind the bushes!'

Walking out towards Snowhill, we added Teal, Wigeon, Mallard and Lapwing, three very nice Snipe and a few Black-tailed Godwits. The light was excellent for most of the day, allowing us very good, often close, views of all

we identified. As the Black Brant was probably the bird of the day for most people, we took advantage of seeing it again from the car park before leaving for home. Thanks to Chris Wright for leading us with extra help from Bernie, Dave, Dorian, Paul and Neil. It was a really enjoyable day.

*Brianne Reeve, Chairman*

## Autumn Sightings, October and November

By October most warbler species have departed leaving Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps to hold the stage and this year was no exception. On 3rd, there were 22 Stonechats (32 on 26<sup>th</sup>) and 9 Whinchats at Truleigh Hill, 25 Chiffchaffs at Brooklands and five species of raptor over Steyning Levels. The first Red-throated Diver, Red-breasted Merganser and flocks of Brent Geese arrived in the first week of the month. Finch, lark, Swallow and wagtail passage got going with light E or SE winds and the Grey Seal (or another?) was seen off Ferring. Raptors in the Lee Farm and Chantry Hill area on 12<sup>th</sup> were 10 Buzzards, two Kestrels, a ringtail Hen Harrier (first seen on 7<sup>th</sup>) and a Merlin. A late Redstart was under Lychpole Hill on 19<sup>th</sup>, and two Ring Ouzels were seen there, and six in the old rifle butts valley at Cissbury, on 24<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately they didn't linger this year and up to 12 near Truleigh Hill in the same period were elusive. Swallows seemed to depart early and just a handful of House Martins made it to the end of the month. Late Common and Black Terns were at Shoreham Harbour on 26<sup>th</sup> and from 28<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> respectively. A male Merlin in her garden was a nice surprise for the Report Editor and 100 Goldfinches delighted our Secretary in hers. An early morning movement on the 30<sup>th</sup> involved 100 Brent, 500 Wood Pigeons and a flock of 8 Little Egrets all flying west.

There was more of the same on November 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> with 6000 Wood Pigeons over Worthing and 150 Brents west, and a Woodcock was flushed near Ferring Rife; 510 Redwings and 130 Fieldfares over Brighton added to these movements. Six Little Auks off Worthing were an exciting prelude to a good period in what frankly had been a pretty mediocre autumn. The latest House Martins appear to be singles over Brighton on 4<sup>th</sup>, Steyning on 7<sup>th</sup>.

Other nice birds up to 10<sup>th</sup> were single Velvet Scoter, Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes on the sea with 30 Razorbills and 30 Great Crested Grebes and two Little Gulls. Black Redstarts were noted at several coastal and inland sites. A Short-eared Owl flew east towards Worthing on 9<sup>th</sup> and a Bonxie west on 10<sup>th</sup>. A long staying Little



*Black Redstart*

*Keith Noble*

Auk in Brighton Marina was last seen on 12<sup>th</sup> when several Purple Sandpipers were also present. A late Wheatear was on Worthing beach on 14<sup>th</sup> and the Water Rail returned to Widewater.

*Clive Hope, Hon. Recorder*

## The 2005 Report

By now you will have had time to read the latest SDOS Report 2005. Once again I am very grateful to all the contributors and particularly the editorial team for producing a Report which is a credit to the SDOS. The high standard of the photographs make it an attractive booklet which will encourage people to take it off the shelf and see that the contents are worth perusal. It was an exciting year due to the astonishing rarities which were found in our area. 2006 will not have such records but I am sure will be no less interesting when we produce that Report.

You may not feel that a bird you have seen warrants sending to Clive, our Recorder, but please let him be the judge. Also do check the list of birds for which we are particularly keen to gather more information, (see page 8 of the Report).

This year we have not included the Tide Tables but we do recognise some of our members would like to have them. Chris Wright will be getting these as soon as they are available from the Beach Inspector and we shall have them at the Indoor Meetings. If you are unable to attend any of these please send me a stamped addressed envelope and you will have them by return. By the way the reason for leaving the Tide Tables out is that it is a very demanding exercise which Jim Steedman introduced and prepared. When it was discussed it was pointed out that all the



local papers print them each week and also we were ready to supply them from the Beach Inspector.

The light-hearted quiz included with your Report is not at all obligatory but I thought it might prompt a few more people to dig a little deeper into what is the culmination of our records. We have had some positive comments and a few complaints. When you do return the answers to the quiz, if you feel like it please let us know what you think about it, how we might improve it and if you have real criticisms. We do try to raise our standards each year and comments from you are important in helping us.

*Brianne Reeve*

Wow, what a corker! It is certainly eye-catching with a stunning photograph of the Grey Phalarope at Brooklands last November. You can make out the pink flush to the throat and side of the face, and the oily reflection in the water is just perfect. On the back cover the ghostly Long-eared Owl stares intently at the photographer—just look at the attenuated pose, those glaring eyes and erect 'ears'. The Report is brimming with quality photographs of local birds, many of them major rarities within the county and nationally. It is quite amazing that within our recording area we have the most densely populated part of the county with over 400,000 people squeezed into the coastal belt, yet we maintain an annual bird list to rival any comparable area in the country. We are so blessed to live and work by the sea and in easy reach of outstanding areas of natural beauty as the downs and river valleys. All this rich habitat helps produce our varied fauna.

Without the dedicated band of committee members, the Report would never be produced or published. Special thanks go to our Editor, Penny Green, for spending hours poring over the publication, sorting out problems, selecting pictures, and liaising with the printers.

The Annual Report would be worthless if we did not have a dedicated band of bird-watchers who record on a daily basis the birds in our area, logging the records and sending them in to our Recorder, Clive Hope, who works all year to to build up the picture of our birdlife. Clive enrolls the help of several writers from the Society to take some of the burden of producing the species accounts, John Newnham works behind the scenes and supplies Clive with many records from the Sussex Ornithological Society database. We are very grateful for this service, without which the birding picture would be incomplete.

I would like to thank all of you for a brilliant effort. I am very pleased with the 2005 Report, which is most professional with quality production and printing. The exquisite vignettes by John Reaney are really top-drawer and would not be out of place in a national publication, and well done all the photographers.

*Bernie Forbes, President*

### **A Local Patch in Hove**

St. Ann's Well Gardens is becoming increasingly known as a little gem of an urban park for birds and I have watched it quite closely during the last seven years. Three especially good areas are: the pond for would-be-bathers of all kinds plus the row of sycamores immediately to the west of the pond conservation area, (at least in this park passerines seem to prefer sycamores to oaks!); the large sycamore immediately to the east of the 'bridge' over the 'stream'; the trees and bushes surrounding the open grass between the pond and bridge.

Regrettably, the park is now less favourable to resident birds than only four years ago because, for reasons unknown, the Council has apparently decided to maintain a more manicured and tidy park, so depriving resident birds of many former nest sites.

Of the residents, Long-tailed Tits invariably attempt to breed each spring and a pair of charismatic Great Spotted Woodpeckers always generates much interest among the general public. Goldfinches occasionally breed, and less often Goldcrests. An extraordinary record for 2003 was of a breeding pair of Grey Wagtails which, if they didn't breed inside the park, quickly introduced their fledglings to the delights of the pond's perpetual waterfall. Reliably reported have been two summer visits by a Kingfisher to the pond!

Annually cheering up winter months is the elusive presence of a Treecreeper, and in those very special winters, a Firecrest. In 2006 a party of Siskins was a nice surprise and could be frequently seen in the vicinity of the pond. When the Siskins were not on show, there was possible compensation in the antics of a Grey Wagtail at the waterfall, at least one of this attractive species arriving each year in late September.

Spring and autumn are, of course, exciting times. In spring several species of warblers pass through the park, including Garden Warblers, Whitethroats and Lesser Whitethroats. Bereft is the spring without the visit of a Sedge or Reed Warbler, (and this in the centre of the city!).

Spotted Flycatchers usually appear but only once have I seen Pied in the spring. However, in autumn Pied become almost common and even outnumber Spotted, (in the last three years the total daily autumnal count of Pied is 23, of Spotted 20). Strangely, Garden Warblers, White-throats and Lesser Whitethroats do not make return autumnal visits, seeming to prefer the nearby Dyke Road Park instead, but once I enjoyed a prolonged sighting of a beautiful Wood Warbler, on 20 August 2003.

In summer butterflies come into their own and I have noted 15 different species, together with an intriguing, tantalising colony of White-letter Hairstreaks. Four species of damselfly grace the pond—Common Blue, Azure, Blue-tailed and Large Red, and at least four species of dragonfly regularly visit, especially the Emperor. I consider myself fortunate to live so close to this little jewel of an urban park.

*Brian Easlea*

### **A Local Patch in High Salvington**

For over 18 years we had dwelt near the centre of West Worthing. In that time we had seen a regular flock of around 20-25 House Sparrows dwindle to just occasional visits from single birds. Starlings stopped breeding and the screaming Swift parties became a meagre half-dozen or so. In the same period adjacent gardens had been cleared of vegetation and some decked, a splendid Scots Pine had been felled and fruiting Ivy cleared from garden walls. Old wooden fascias and soffits had been replaced with modern plastics and one new neighbour arrived with 7 cats while the neighbour the other side acquired two more cats in addition to her existing pair! Other cats came over the wall from the gardens at the back! No wonder we had few birds and what we did see, mainly during the breeding season, arrived and departed in seconds. These were single pairs of Great and Blue Tits and the occasional Greenfinch. Fledglings of all three species were brought to the feeders for just a few days by their parents but pretty soon after they all disappeared. The notable exception was the Goldfinches. They were initially attracted by Teasels, and then took a liking to the no-mess food and finally niger seed. On occasions 15-20 birds, some with newly fledged young, twittered in the apple tree above the feeders. A real delight! The only other stalwarts were the Collared Doves, although now and again a scattering of their feathers suggested a



Sparrowhawk may have passed through. I initially blamed the cats!

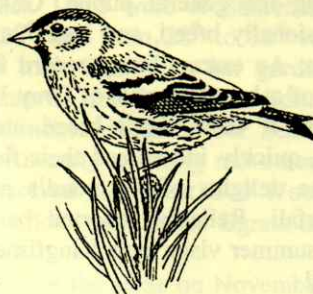
With the offer of an early retirement package from my employers and with daughters long having left home it was time for a move. After much searching we settled on a house in a leafy lane at the top of High Salvington only 170 metres from a bridleway leading on to the downs. The house is surrounded by trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders; Scots Pine, Beech, Oak, Horse Chestnut and Silver Birch. Down one side of the house we have Elder, Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Yew and an Ash. On the other boundary is what I think is a Norway Spruce. From the first floor we can see the sea and the sails, or to use the Sussex term, sweeps of Salvington Windmill.

We moved in at the beginning of March this year and with the furniture hardly in I'd put the feeders up! Full of expectation we waited to see what would arrive. We didn't have to wait long as almost immediately good numbers of Greenfinch plus Blue Tit, Great Tit, Chaffinch, Blackbird, Dunnock, Robin and Coal Tit were on or around the feeders or in the garden. Goldcrest fed in the spruce and Long-tailed Tits were nearly always in the garden. Wrens lurked. Wintering male and female Blackcap appeared from time to time to feed on the bird table and eat the Ivy berries. Crows, Magpies and Wood Pigeons clumped about on the flat dormer roof. Real surprises were Nuthatches coming to the bird table, a Pheasant and then three poking about in the back garden and a Mistle Thrush singing from the top of our Beech tree. My notebook mentions squirrels visiting from time to time. At this stage we thought they were charming! The end of March brought the first sighting of a Goldfinch and a male Great Spotted Woodpecker excavating holes in the Silver Birch. He turned up several times during the following weeks and his hammerings usually attracted a Nuthatch who inspected the handiwork after the woodpecker had left. Presumably he hoped for a ready made nesting hole. Added to the garden list was a single House Sparrow chirruping from the undergrowth, Song Thrush hunting on the front lawn and a male Siskin perched in the Silver Birch.

As spring finally arrived the sound of the dawn chorus was astounding – something we had never been used to. It was a joy to hear but it's amazing how much more effective than an alarm clock is the repeated high pitched alarm/anxiety call of a Blue Tit! From first light for an hour or two each morning one kept this call going

for several days right outside the bedroom window. It was occupying a nestbox nearby. The first Chiffchaff or Willow Warbler appeared on April 8<sup>th</sup> and more were seen but in fewer numbers than expected. Suet feeders became particularly popular at this time, a whole block being devoured in just 3 days. Long-tailed Tit, Goldcrest and Great Spotted Woodpecker were regular feeders. Herring Gulls investigated the dormer roof as a potential nest site but fortunately it wasn't to their liking. Four Buzzards drifted overhead and if you listened you could just hear the song of Skylarks on West Hill. A Tawny Owl called in the evening.

As the young birds fledged the garden filled with adults and youngsters, particularly Blue Tits. They crowded round the feeders and drinking bowls, lined up on the branches and bounced, unharmed, off the windows. For several weeks they never seemed to leave the garden. Broods of young Great Tits and Coal Tits visited regularly and young Dunnock, Robin, Greenfinch and Chaffinch were being fed most days. A pair of Song Thrushes escorted two fledglings through the flower border and a young Great Spot spent most of his days on the suet feeder! A Green Woodpecker fed its single offspring by drilling holes in the neighbour's front lawn.



*Siskin*

*John Reaney*

Once the youngsters were independent things went a little quieter until autumn migration. Apart that is from the day when the top of the Silver Birch snapped off – just where the Great Spot had been excavating. Neither it nor the Nuthatch had nested there – they must have known! New for the garden list at this time was Spotted Flycatcher. Using the bare branches at the top of what remained of the Silver Birch as hunting platform one stayed for sometime,

flycatching! A Garden Warbler turned up in the Scots Pine one morning; we watched while we had breakfast in bed. Returning Willow Warblers and then Chiffchaffs were seen from time to time. They also liked the Scots Pine. Being so close to the downs I thought Whitethroat or Lesser Whitethroat might turn up but if they did I didn't see them.

I now have a local "patch" walk which, from the front door, takes me past the mast on West Hill then along to Church Hill. From there it's down by Findon cricket field, along near the church, round to Rogers Farm then back up to West Hill and home. There have been 6 or 7 pairs of Skylark, plus Meadow Pipit, Linnet and Yellowhammer on West Hill as well as spring Wheatear and in the early autumn a small fall of Willow Warblers. Later were Stonechat and Redwing. Marsh Tit, Jay and, in summer, Lesser Whitethroat are usually around the Church Hill area with Buzzard and Kestrel overhead. The cricket field has produced Sparrowhawk and Rogers Farm held up to seven Moorhen (where's the water?), Swallow and House Martin and still has Pied Wagtail. Other species such as Blackcap and Whitethroat in season, Bullfinch, Jay and both Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers are seen, or more usually heard, throughout the walk.

What we don't see from the garden are Starlings, and House Sparrows and Collared Doves only visit occasionally. Rooks and Jackdaws are often passing overhead and no doubt there is much more but views are restricted by all the trees and I don't pick up all the calls. Other than birds we have seen bats (sp!), Wood Mouse, Hummingbird Hawk Moth and Grass Snake. Best of all has been to watch the birds behaving naturally; feeding, sparring, mating, sunning, preening or just snoozing. So, as I type, the leaves blow off the trees and a female Great Spotted Woodpecker tucks into suet and peanuts. Can't be bad!

*Brian Clay*

## Subscriptions

Subscriptions are due on 1st January 2007. Please pay at a meeting or send to our Membership Secretary: Shena Maskell, 41 St. Lawrence Avenue, Worthing BN14 7JJ

Please send items for the next Newsletter by March 9 to the Editor:

Keith Noble, 19 Roman Road, STEYNING, BN44 3FN,

Email: noble@karg.freemove.co.uk