

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Autumn
2006

NEWSLETTER

Coming soon

Our first speaker this autumn has visited a large sample of Britain's nature reserves, travelled widely abroad, and entertained many audiences with his accounts of their habitats and wildlife. Brian Nobbs is also a great RSPB supporter, taking a leading role with his wife Jean in the Groups at Sevenoaks and previously Guildford. Come and enjoy a tour of some wonderful places for birds.

We look forward eagerly to another visit from Gordon Langsbury in November. His pictures regularly appear in wildlife magazines and I have been specially impressed by his shots of northern owls hunting over the snow. Here is a fine chance to view the Arctic from the warmth of St Peter's.

The Isles of Scilly have the lot - lovely scenery, sandy beaches, clear seas and a mild climate. Add to all these delights an amazing variety of migrant and vagrant birds and you have a winning subject for our evening with Terry Bond in December.

We have five more outings before the end of the year, starting at Climping. Here we can look for migrants in the bushes, waders on the beach, and seabirds and wildfowl offshore, at a time of year when there is a chance of something special. If you'd like to know more about this and our other venues, you'll find them very well presented in 'Best Birdwatching Sites in Sussex' by Adrian Thomas and Peter Francis.

Buzzards are a near certainty, and other raptors including Hen Harriers a fair bet, on top of the Downs at Kithurst in November. Finches and buntings flock here. Afterwards, Rackham has woodland birds and views across Amberley Wildbrooks.



Hen Harrier

Keith Noble

We return to the Arun valley the next weekend, when Wigeon, Pintail, Teal and Shovelers should be around in their hundreds. Greatham is usually good for a Barn Owl, and we might find a Short-eared Owl too.

In December, East Head at the mouth of Chichester Harbour offers big flocks of waders and wildfowl, perhaps Slavonian Grebes and sea-ducks. Then we follow Christmas with a morning around Shoreham, with Turnstones and Rock Pipits on the beach, and perhaps one or two Purple Sandpipers and Black Redstarts. Come along to scan the sea and Harbour.

As we think about the close of the 2006 programme, this seems a good time to thank all who have attended SDOS events, and especially Chris Wright for organising them, and the Outings Leaders: Dave Smith, Paul Stevens, Bernie Forbes, John Newnham, Brianne Reeve, Dorian Mason, Clive Hope, Santa et al.

Keith Noble, Newsletter Editor

INDOOR MEETINGS

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

Oct 10

Reserved for Birds

with Brian Nobbs

Nov 14

Lapland Wilderness with

Gordon Langsbury

Dec 12

Isles of Scilly with Terry Bond

FIELD OUTINGS

Oct 7 (Sat)

Climping

Meet 09.30 at Climping Beach
OS 197, GR TQ 006008.

Leader Clive Hope

Nov 19 (Sun)

Kithurst Hill and Rackham

Meet 09.30 in Kithurst Hill car
park OS 197, GR TQ 070125.

Leader Paul Stevens

Nov 26 (Sun)

Arun Valley

Meet 09.30 in Greatham Bridge
car park OS 197, TQ 032163.

Leader Bernie Forbes

Dec 2 (Sat)

East Head

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

Leader Chris Wright

Dec 30 (Sat, am only)

Seasonal Gathering

Meet 09.30 in Fort Haven car
park OS 198, GR TQ 233046.

This summer we saw...

On 23 April nineteen members joined Bernie Forbes at Burton Pond hoping that the drizzle would ease and it would warm up a little. We did the circular walk and despite the dull conditions managed to find a few birds. The usual Grey Wagtail flew over the car park and plenty of Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs belted out their songs with the odd Nuthatch joining in. Courting Great-crested Grebes displayed on Burton pond. A calling Bullfinch avoided us, just melting in to the woodland, but a pair of Woodlarks flew around with one of the birds settling in a tree to give excellent scope views, as did a Yellowhammer. Little Grebes on Black pond were nice. Chingford pond had a few ducks including Teal and Gadwall. In the conifer woods we could hear Goldcrest and Coal Tit songs, and in the thick reedy edges of the pond one or two Reed Warblers were beginning to sing.

A Whitethroat put in a brief appearance on the edge of the wood, and out on the field where the large finch flock gathered to feed in the winter we had a small flock of Linnets. In the trees right above our heads a few Redpolls were seen briefly and we heard their chattering calls. Out on one of the cleared commons we had close views of Tree Pipit and another pair of Woodlarks. After lunch we set off for Coates Common (Lords Piece), where there were good views of sparring Great-spotted Woodpeckers, Goldfinch and another pair of Woodlarks.

Our final location was Waltham brooks, where we had a stroll down river, adding singing Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat, Cetti's Warbler with Reed Warbler chortling from the river bank. A brief squeal from a Water Rail came from the dense aquatic vegetation of the brooks. Some time was spent trying to hear the reeling Grasshopper Warbler; we all managed to hear the call but only one of the group saw the bird. A Cuckoo called and Whimbrel flew close by, replying to Bernie's skilful whistling! Good numbers of Swallows, House and Sand Martins were out over the brooks hawking insects.

About sixteen people gathered at the shelter south of Alinora Avenue, Goring on 30 April for the annual Society sea-watch with John Newnham. North or north-west winds gave way to a very light easterly. As it had been a quiet week for Sussex sea-watching, hopes were not high, but we really did quite

well. Two Red-throated Divers flew past, and several individuals and parties of Gannets and Fulmars. There were several flocks of Common Scoters, and the waders included Sanderlings, Bar-tailed Godwits and Whimbrels. We saw four Mediterranean Gulls, and Sandwich, Common, and Little Terns. More than 20 Swallows arrived, four Swifts, and single Sand Martin, Yellow Wagtail and Hobby.

We were due to meet at Earham Woods on 7 May, but Brianne Reeve decided, after a visit the day before, to re-locate to Greatham. Although there had been two very nice Tree Pipits and a pair of copulating Sparrowhawks in the woods, large areas were entirely devoid of any birds. Greatham Bridge at 6am turned out to be an excellent alternative. There were only five members but we saw and/or heard a total of 45 species, a very good score for an early morning walk. We started with a Barn Owl flying low over the Brooks, which gave us close views all the time we were there. Then we could compare the songs of Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat at almost touching distance. It was quite difficult for everyone to distinguish between the mass of song at that time in the morning: Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Dunnock, Robin and Wren all belting out various levels of song, with Blackcap and Willow Warbler joining in, and the weak song of the Reed Bunting for good measure. We saw all these birds quite easily.

It was nice to watch Lapwings being particularly protective of their young. Redshanks were calling and we saw a group of three Dunlins, one Gadwall with Mallards and Shelducks and a good number of Pied Wagtails. A delightful Treecreeper entertained us as it searched for food among the rotten branches. As we returned there were the harsh calls from two Jays. Out on the Brooks again we enjoyed more views of that superb Barn Owl (voted Bird of the Day) and we had excellent views of a Cuckoo in flight with its distinctive drooping wings. We added Sedge and Reed Warblers, the former collecting Phragmites for nesting material, several more Reed Buntings looking wonderfully smart when seen at close quarters, Stonechat and Linnets. There were more to record and of course some I would have liked to add to the list.

We didn't hear a Nightingale, Cetti's Warbler or Garden Warbler (which was then when I checked yesterday) and only one person heard the elusive Grasshopper Warbler. Nevertheless we really did have a good time and I think those who came are going to try to remember the songs they heard today and treat themselves to some

bird-song tapes! Learning the songs is another challenging side to birdwatching and is amazingly satisfying.

Fourteen members gathered in the Shatterford car park at Beaulieu Road Station on 4 June for the annual New Forest walk. Bernie led them in a figure of eight stroll of about nine kilometres. It was warm with a little high cloud cover masking the worst of the penetrating sun's rays - ideal birding conditions. A Siskin sat up in a pine tree in the car park to start us off and we were escorted by displaying Curlews as we walked out over the heath, with numerous families of Stonechats. A fairly close Honey Buzzard gave stunning views as it drifted out over the heath before heading back toward the woodland gaining height and soon lost to the eye. In the forest plenty of Redstarts were calling and busily gathering food for their young. We found many splendid males. A pair of Garden Warblers gave themselves up on the edge of the woodland. This is one of the few songs that I have real difficulty with, separating it from its close cousin the Blackcap. We heard and just glimpsed three Crossbills as they moved over the high canopy. The woods were alive with Treecreepers. We also notched up Great Spotted Woodpecker and could hear young birds calling from a nest. A distant high raptor was identified through the scope as a Red Kite, unfortunately drifting away from us and only a dot in the bins. We sat up on a small hill to take lunch and had panoramic views over the woodland finding Common Buzzard, another Honey Buzzard in the haze and a couple of Hobbies too far away to make out much detail. A sharp-eyed member

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.



found a female Emperor moth laying its eggs on a burnt stump; we all enjoyed this rare sight. Another circuit back into the woods added Nuthatch and Sparrowhawk and we managed to find a pair of Spotted Flycatchers moving around the canopy. Our final walk out over the heath, we gain good views of hunting Hobby and another long range view of Honey Buzzard. Calling and chasing Redshanks were difficult to see in the afternoon haze. Not seeing any Dartford Warbler, Wood Warbler or Woodlark was disappointing. In all, it was a somewhat below par day for us in the Forest although the Honey Buzzards made up in quality for the lack of variety.

At Cissbury Ring on 8 July, eighteen members gathered in brilliant weather. A pleasant breeze meant it was comfortable for a walk with Clive Hope, encompassing the outer ramparts of the Ring.

As expected birds were not abundant but some 24 species were seen or heard. Most appreciated were a rather distant Little Owl sitting in a tree, overflying Buzzard and, somewhat unexpectedly, a 2nd year Mediterranean Gull. Two Kestrels, many Linnets and the odd skulking Whitethroat were typical fare but strangely no Stonechat revealed itself!

However, the real treat was the abundance and variety of butterflies. With help from Mike Snelling, we logged about 16 species: literally hundreds of Marbled Whites, probably in excess of 50 Dark Green Fritillaries, several Painted Ladies, a few Common Blues, a Small Copper, Ringlets, Gatekeepers, Small Heaths, Red Admirals, at least two Commas, a few Small Tortoiseshells, many Meadow Browns, two species of Skipper and two of White. There were also Six-spot Burnet, Cinnabar and Silver-Y moths. We finished with close study of a small colony of Frog Orchids on the upper slopes of Lychpole Hill.

Nine members met Brianne at Birling Gap on 19 August after a forecast of heavy showers, and set off under the lee of the hill towards Horseshoe Plantation. There was so much activity in the scrub and out on the paths, we were happily occupied watching Stonechats, White-throats and Willow Warblers. Above us came wader calls and against the cloud we had good views of two Greenshanks, an unexpected bonus. The telegraph wires were drooping with a huge flock of noisy Starlings which alternated between the wires and the scrub area. A Spotted Flycatcher performed its characteristic flight

as we added Swallows, Linnets and Goldfinches to our list.

We moved on, using the footpath between the scrub and the meadow by the road and this is where we started to see butterflies. They were curiously sedentary, so giving us particularly clear views at very close quarters. We could compare males and females and the different species: Common and Chalkhill Blues, Brown Argus and Silver-spotted Skipper, (these latter two landed on the same Knapweed flowerhead which would have made a fantastic photograph!). Meanwhile we were still adding to the bird list with an excellent Lesser Whitethroat and the only raptor of the day, a Kestrel. The Plantation offered very little except a rowdy Green Woodpecker, the cheerful call of the Chiffchaff and a Song Thrush breaking its way into a snail very loudly!



Buzzards

Keith Noble

As we had a short rest we were entertained by more butterflies, Red Admiral, Painted Lady and Speckled Wood and a very obliging Humming-bird Hawk Moth. Below the path there was continual movement of Blues with the contrasting lavender of the Common, shining silver of the Chalkhill and then, the one which makes you gasp, the enamel blue of the male Adonis. Two Small Coppers and just one Clouded Yellow completed the record.

We had probably seen more than a thousand butterflies before lunch which we took looking down towards the light-house, with Swallows, Swifts, House and Sand Martins swooping low over us all the time. The Eastbourne Airshow also gave us a special flypast! On the way back across the top of the cliffs we had more excellent views of adult and young Stonechats and two Whinchats.

The flowers were superb and so varied with several species like Clustered Bell-

flower, Autumn Gentian and Carline Thistle a delight to see. It was an amazing day for the quantity of birds and butterflies recorded.

For the Mumbles open ringing morning on 2 September, Phil Clay and his team were out at 5.30 to set up the nets, and displays. There were only ten nets in operation in order to make way for the "Nature Trail" so the visitors could see the site and not get tangled up!

Were it not the open day, we may have had second thoughts about netting in the wind but the conditions were acceptable as long as the rain kept off, as it did, apart from a light sprinkle now and again. Some thirty visitors made their way in. We caught 54 birds, nearly all before 7.00, a nice variety but nothing unexpected.

Shoreham Bird Report

The SDOS 2005 Report has been compiled from 9842 records submitted by 158 contributors of whom 32 are SDOS members. The majority of the remainder are members of the Sussex Ornithological Society. Two hundred and ten species and four sub-species were recorded in the Area during the year.

One was new to the area (and Sussex) - an Iceland Gull of the race known as Kumlien's Gull. Four had only been recorded once before: Laughing Gull, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Bee-Eater and Common Rosefinch. Several species counts of numbers seen were the highest ever recorded.

Full details of these and all the sightings will be available in the report.

Please note that the Hon. Recorder, Clive Hope has moved and now lives at:

22 Upper West Drive
FERRING
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Phone 01903 700498

Rwanda 2006

Rwanda may not be a country that readily comes to mind when thinking about a birding trip, even for key Central and East African species. I imagine most people, even birders, will picture Rwanda as dangerous, poor, and war-torn.

If I start by discounting all three of these concerns, and then add good accommodation, good food, good roads, (although not much in the way of signposts), and friendly, helpful people, plus some very special birds, then perhaps you'll see why Rwanda could be a different and produc-

tive country to visit. All the problems I encountered in my one week visit to this attractive country were caused by organisational issues not associated with Rwandan infrastructure. On the contrary, a temporary lack of funding to make the advance payments that are the norm in the area was alleviated by the ability to negotiate continued birding, eating and living on IOUs.

So why visit Rwanda for birds?

Rwanda has an accessible site for Shoebill, in the Akagera National Park on its eastern border with Tanzania. Other papyrus swamp specialities occur there, although we didn't find them at all easy to lure out of cover.

And Rwanda holds a significant number of Albertine Rift Endemics (AREs) in its Nyungwe Forest Reserve on the Burundi-Congo borders. We managed twenty AREs and a similar number of range restricted species that occur outside the Albertine Rift but, for instance, only in Gabon or Cameroon. The two specials, Kungwe Apalis and Red-collared Mountain-Babbler, were both found with the help of local knowledge from the Uwinka Park Office. The Volcan National Park in the north-west of Rwanda was where Diane Fossee watched her Mountain Gorillas and inspired 'Gorillas in the Mist'. The logistics of the trip involved two days at Akagera (savannah, papyrus swamp) and three days at Nyungwe Forest (high altitude primary and gallery forest) in south-west Rwanda close to Lake Kivu, which forms the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The country gave the appearance of stability, helped perhaps by a strong military presence especially in the Nyungwe area where it was common to encounter armed soldiers, gun in one hand, a friendly wave with the other. It also has the advantage of being small. Starting from the capital, Kigale, a journey of about 200km in any direction would take you into Congo, Uganda, Tanzania or Burundi.

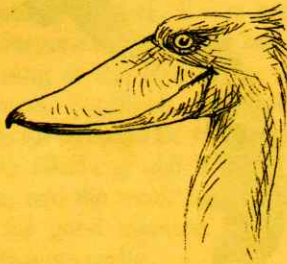
The accommodation at Akagera (Akagera Park Lodge) was not cheap, but with good views over Itema Lake, clean well-furnished rooms where all facilities worked, and an excellent menu, the cost was easily justified. The breakfast 'spread' was lavish, even at birding hours. The accommodation in Nyungwe was at the Gisakura Rest Camp, described in my itinerary as 'basic but comfortable with shared facilities'. Forget any comparisons with Gibraltar Point Observatory. The rooms were again of a high standard and it was no pokey 'bathroom', well-appointed with hot water at all

times. So 'basic' seriously undersold the place even if the menu here was limited (a set meal). Breakfast was porridge, toast, omelette, fruit juice, tea/coffee and was readily available at 0530 if requested. Indeed, if you didn't get there on time, there was a knock at the door to advise breakfast was ready.

I took Malarone for malaria prevention, one tablet per day, and I think I took more tablets than I saw mosquitoes. On the other hand, Akagera does have a problem with tsetse flies but I am assured only a very low percentage carry sleeping sickness. Smother yourself in suncream and it seems to put them off. They only bite the unprotected areas.

If you can accept the £800 airfare to get there, it's a destination I can thoroughly recommend, which could easily be combined with the Bwindi Forest in Uganda or the Volcan National Park.

If anyone is interested and would like to have more details, please contact me at 'trevor@thecopse1946.wanadoo.co.uk'.



Shoebill

Keith Noble

I'll sign off with a selection of the best birds seen (in my opinion). ARE means Albertine Rift Endemic.

Shoebill, Mountain Buzzard, Turacos (Great Blue, Black Billed, Rwenzori-ARE), Black & White Casqued Hornbill, Scaly Francolin, Red-Faced Barbet-ARE, Dwarf Honeyguide-ARE, White-headed Sawwing, Red-throated Alethe-ARE, Black-faced Apalis-ARE, Rwenzori Apalis-ARE, Archer's Robin-Chat-ARE, Mountain Illadopsis, Stripe-breasted Tit-ARE, Regal Sunbird-ARE, Blue-headed Sunbird-ARE, Doherty's Bush-Shrike, Strange Weaver-ARE, Dusky Crimson-wing-ARE, Kungwe Apalis-ARE, Red-collared Mountain-Babbler-ARE.

Trevor Rackstraw

Your Editor is distracted

On this fine September morning, three House Martins are circling and trilling above my head. Two wide-eyed youngsters pop their heads out of the nest to look for the next beakful. They are the second brood, and I wonder if the extra flying bird is one the pair made earlier. This nest is artificial, of fired clay like a flower pot, and those either side, which the birds are not using this year, are of some sort of plastic. They are fixed over my son's bedroom window, and the droppings fall on the clear roof of the conservatory where I am writing. After the birds have left, (could they fit in a third brood?), Rob being lighter and more agile than me, will climb out to clear the patch of guano. During the winter I shall watch shortly after sunset to see if a Blue Tit roosts up there again.

It is time to return the SOS House Martin Survey form. Between my house and the brooks I have noted two other occupied nests, one natural, the other artificial on a house called Martin's Lodge. Next door, two cube-shaped wooden boxes which were used in the past have been taken down, and nearby there are remains of mud nests from the time when six or more pairs bred here. In Bramber and Beeding active nests are near the river, by the Bridge, in Saltings Way and Dawn Crescent. Although one or two bungalows have strips of cloth or plastic hung in their gables to deter martins, there are plenty of suitable sites, traces of old nests and a vast supply of building material from the Adur at low tide. If our martins are declining, is it from a shortage of insect food here, or are there problems on migration and in their little-known winter quarters?

When I started writing, a Spotted Flycatcher was hunting from the very top of a tall cypress beyond the bottom of our garden. A Great Spotted Woodpecker bounded across and a Kestrel and a Sparrowhawk have been circling. On our seed feeders, and so eligible for the SDOS Garden Bird Survey form blutacked by the kitchen window, are Greenfinches, Goldfinches and tits, their numbers swelled by many youngsters.

What have you been watching? Please contribute your records to the Report, take part in surveys and send me some copy for the next issue.

Please send items for the next Newsletter by November 20 to the Editor:

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