

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Spring
2007

NEWSLETTER

Sumer is icumen in

Lhude sing cuccu! Cuckoos and a variety of warblers should be performing with the resident birds for early risers on May 12. We are likely to see nesting Lapwings and Redshanks, Swallows and martins; perhaps a Barn Owl will treat us to lovely views as on last year's Dawn Chorus.

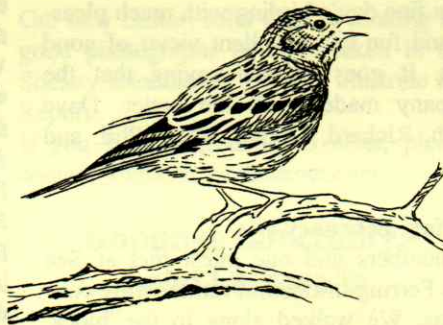
But first we have our popular annual Seawatch. Mediterranean Gulls could well be moving with Sandwich and Common Terns. We might see strings of Scoters and Brent Geese, Bar-tailed Godwits and seven-whistling Whimbrels. As well as birds heading east, we shall look out for cross-Channel arrivals - Swallows and Swifts, Wheatears and wagtails. A folding chair would be useful, and if this April heatwave continues, a hat and bottle of water!

Blackdown is the highest hill in Sussex, close to the Surrey border and Haslemere. This is Scots Pine and heather country with wonderful views. It is also one of our tougher outings, rated on your programme card as Moderate to Demanding over a distance of 6km.

Anchor Bottom will be easier, as we start from the top of the hill overlooking the Cement Works. As well as watching for the birds which nest in the quarry, we should enjoy Downland flowers and butterflies.

Nightjars, Woodcocks, Tree Pipits, Nightingales and owls will be targets of our evening at Lavington. You might like to bring a torch and some protection against midges.

Butterflies could be more abundant than birds on Cissbury in July. Last year, as well as Buzzard, Little Owl and Linnets we saw hundreds of Marbled Whites and at least 50 Dark Green Fritillaries.



Tree Pipit

John Reaney

Adonis and Chalkhill Blues and Silver-spotted Skippers love the herby grassland at Birling Gap, where many migrant birds gather for the flight south. We are likely to find warblers and chats, hirundines and flycatchers.

Of all this season's outings, September at Pagham should produce the greatest number and variety of birds, with waders and other waterbirds on the Ferry Pool and in the Harbour, small migrants in the bushes and a good chance of passing raptors. With luck, it will bring this part of our programme to a great finish.

Fuller details of these outings, including walking distances and difficulty, and Leaders' telephone numbers, are on your programme card. Have a fine summer and come along on October 9 when our indoor meetings in Shoreham resume with Simon Curson talking about Bird Ringing in Canada.

Keith Noble, Newsletter Editor

FIELD OUTINGS

Apr 29 (Sun)

Goring Seawatch (am only)

Meet 08.00 at shelter by Alinora Avenue, OS 198, GR TQ117018. Leader John Newnham

May 12 (Sat)

Dawn Chorus (am only)

Meet 05.30 at Greatham Bridge car park OS 197, GR TQ032163. Leader Brianne Reeve

May 20 (Sun)

Blackdown Hill

Meet 09.30 in Blackdown N.T. car park OS 186, GR SU920309. Leader Bernie Forbes

May 25 (Fri)

Anchor Bottom (evening)

Meet 19.30 in Beeding Hill car park, OS 198, GR TQ208097. Leader Chris Wright

June 15 (Fri)

Lavington Common (evening)

Meet 19.30 in Greatham Bridge car park OS 197, GR TQ032163. Leader Dorian Mason

July 14 (Sat)

Cissbury Ring (am only)

Meet 09.30 in National Trust car park, OS 198, GR TQ139084. Leader Chris Wright

August 19 (Sun)

Birling Gap

Meet 09.30 in Birling Gap N.T. car park, OS 199, GR TV555959. Leader Brianne Reeve

Sept 16 (Sun)

Pagham

Meet 09.30 at Sidlesham Centre car park, OS 197, GR SZ857965. Leader Bernie Forbes

We went and saw...

Adur Valley, January 7th

Fifteen people left Woods Mill in dull drizzle, crossing the road to the footpath past the Sewage Works and along the stream to the Downslink. The tall thick hedges still held plenty of sloes and haws and many Redwings - during the day we must have seen a few hundred, and later many Fieldfares too. A Grey Wagtail flew over, (on our return we had much better views here as one posed for the telescope). Two male Bullfinches gave fleeting glimpses until one came out glowing against a dark bush, and hovered to show its white rump.

Reaching the Downslink, we turned towards Henfield and through a muddy gateway onto the footpath overlooking the Levels. We had good views of twelve adult and two young Bewick's Swans on the shallow water, twenty Grey Lags, and about a hundred Lapwings. Brianne flushed a Little Owl.

We returned to the Downslink and walked towards the Adur, seeing many more winter thrushes, a party of Long-tailed Tits, and a Treecreeper. Some people left before and after lunch at Stretham Bridge, and just six of us headed up the windswept river bank past Wyckham Wood with its rookery and heronry. Although many Rooks were probing the fields, we did not see a single Heron or Little Egret.

A Bewick's Swan family, the two adults either side of their two young, gave a lovely fly-past. Before we crossed Bineham Bridge, we scoped a male Kestrel, brightly coloured in the better afternoon light, and enjoyed close views of more Long-tailed Tits. On the way back we watched another Kestrel hunting. It hovered for a while at some height, then again just a few feet up before swooping into the rough grass. It came up carrying what was probably a vole. The outing finished with calls of Great Spotted Woodpecker and Nuthatch back at the Mill.

Dungeness, January 14th

Dave Smith led a small but perfectly formed group of six members to the Dungeness peninsular on what turned out to be a wonderful, clear crisp morning. As usual, we started with a seawatch by the power station, and in just under an hour saw at least sixty Red-Throated Divers, six Gannets, a Kittiwake, a bullet train of Common Scoters, and the usual may-

hem by the patch.

A little further east, by the fishing boats, we saw more Red-throated Divers on the sea, with between two and three hundred Great Crested Grebes spread over a huge area. Back at the car park a female Black Redstart gave a good show.

On the gravel pits in the RSPB reserve we found Goldeneye, Ruddy Duck, and 3 female Goosanders on the main pit by the visitor centre, but the stars by a country mile were more than a dozen Smew, including five males. Most agreed that these were their best views ever. Continuing north through the pits we heard, but did not see, Cetti's Warbler and Bearded Tit.

During the day we saw four Marsh Harriers and a ringtail Hen Harrier. We tracked down the Bewick's Swans just north of Lydd, a group of about 130, and a wonderful sight. On the way home we made a short stop at Scotney for a final distant Marsh Harrier and a Redshank, one of the few waders we saw all day. It was a fine day's birding with much pleasure and fun and excellent views of good birds. It goes without saying that the company made it all the better. Dave Smith, Richard, Dorian, Mike, Phil, and Paul.

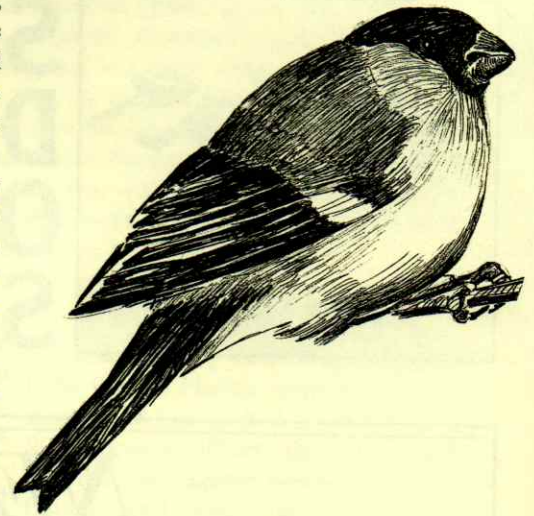
Ferring, February 4th

22 members and one guest met at Sea Lane Ferring in fine but rather chilly conditions. We walked along to the 'block' and studied the shore and sea for some time picking out a selection of waders (Redshank, Dunlin, Sanderling, Grey and Ringed Plovers, Turnstone, Oystercatcher) and scoping the Red-breasted Mergansers and Great Crested Grebes. We later walked along to the Rife and up the western side. Little Egret and a brief flight view of a Water Rail were the highlights, but there was no sign of any Snipe despite Dave Smith and Paul Stevens going through the water meadows. On the eastern side, we enjoyed a pair of Stonechats in the sunshine.

We continued through Ferring village to the fields on the western edge of Goring Gap, adding Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, before returning to the cars. Dave and I had a further short look off the block and picked out two Slavonian Grebes on the sea. All enjoyed the walk and it was encouraging to see such a good turnout. We logged a total of 41 species.

East Head, March 3rd

18 members, (some new), met on a clear morning at the car park by the Head. Three of us took a quick look at



Bullfinch

Paul Stevens

the Brent Geese before everyone arrived and found a very close Black Brant almost immediately. It was no sooner found than lost, when a thoughtful couple let their dog out of the car!

We started onto the Head on a rising tide with the weather really brightening and the Skylarks doing likewise. Oystercatchers, Grey Plovers, Ringed Plovers, Redshanks, Curlews, Sanderlings and Dunlins moved around as the tide rose, forming some very large flocks and giving terrific views in what was now perfect weather. Looking into the harbour, we saw Slavonian Grebes and divers but they tended to be either distant or elusive. Great Crested Grebes were more obliging, as were a group of 14 Red-breasted Mergansers, but the Jack Snipe that had previously been seen amongst the marsh in the dunes were not to be found.

After lunch in the car park we agreed to have a serious search through the Brents for the Black Brant, which would be a new bird for quite a few. Little did I realise what a difficult task this would prove to be! But after about an hour of scouring and repositioning, not one but two were found, although it must be said that one was not strongly marked and a possible hybrid.

We moved happily on to the marsh where a Greenshank stood next to a Redshank for useful comparison. Snipe became more obvious the more we looked, which was a lot. We spotted a Chiffchaff and heard a Grey Partridge. A Goldcrest flew over, pairs of Stonechats were here and there and plenty of Meadow pipits everywhere.

As ever, we had a fine time with really pleasant knowledgeable company.

Anything about?

Interest in the first few weeks of the New Year centred on Henfield Levels where a herd of up to 30 Bewick's Swans took up residence. A few more ducks than in recent winters were also present there, and when in February large amounts of rain fell, these increased further with up to 282 Pintail recorded in early March.

The Short-eared and Barn Owls from 2006 continued to be seen intermittently near the Airport into February, and the Great Northern Diver was likewise somewhat elusive in Southwick Canal, most often being seen near the fishing boats at the eastern end. A Little Gull was on the Adur on 1st with 10 Golden Plover nearby on the airfield. Two Jack Snipe were flushed at Beeding marshes on 4th, an immature Iceland Gull flew west past Ferring on 5th and a Black Redstart was at the Fort on 10th. The Water Rail gave patient observers good views at Widewater in this period. A Pink-footed Goose was found on the Upper Adur levels late in the month and a male Hen Harrier was seen at Stump Bottom on the Downs.

Good numbers of Dunlin, Turnstone and Sanderling were wintering along the coast but the expected numbers of Red-breasted Mergansers and Great Crested Grebes were well down. Four Purple Sandpipers were the maximum at Shoreham Harbour mouth.

A fairly heavy snowfall on 24th brought with it a few ducks to the coast, but auks were surprisingly scarce all winter with none of the big movements of the last few years.

A Dartford Warbler was at Beeding on Feb 3rd and two Slavonian Grebes appeared off Ferring on 4th, just as the Society outing was breaking up; one remained for at least three days. A ring-tailed Hen Harrier was over Harrow Hill in the west of the area on 6th. Brent Geese were on the move up-channel soon after this with 100+ on 10th and small numbers on many subsequent days. 75 Corn Buntings at Anchor Bottom was a good count. Mediterranean Gulls began to be a regular coastal sighting with, for example, 3 adults east off Ferring on 21st. A Yellow-browed Warbler was discovered wintering in a Southwick garden on Feb 25 but may have been present for some time. It remained until at least March 29th.

Black Redstarts were at the Bluebird café, Ferring, on Mar 4th and a female nearer Goring gap on 16th. Another immature Iceland Gull was found on the Adur on 11th and was still present in the area at the end of the month. The first Wheatear in our area was on Worthing beach on 14th

with very few thereafter until a small fall along the beaches on 27th. Red Kites were over Steyning on 14th and 26th and 10 Buzzards over Brighton on the latter date. The first Swallow was seen over Steyning on 26th and an Avocet was on the Adur on 28th.

Cold north-easterly winds are keeping migration to a minimum as I write this in early April.

Clive Hope, Hon. Recorder

The SDOS Report for 2006

Since the annual report for 2006 is likely to be bigger than ever due to the increase in records received, volunteers to take on some of the species accounts would be extremely welcome. This need not be particularly onerous – if you can summarise the records for just a few species this would be a great help. If you are prepared to assist please call me on 01903 700498 or e-mail me at clive.hope@virgin.net.

Clive Hope

Our new Editor, John Crix, is looking for good photographs of birds taken in the Society area during 2006 to illustrate the Report.

If you have something to offer, please contact john.crix@btinternet.com.

Goodbye Sanctuary, hello Ladywells

Members of the Society's committee and those present at indoor meetings will be aware that Southern Water have been selling their properties and land not directly involved in their pumping or water treatment operations. The Society was informed in September 2006 that the waterworks copse (Sanctuary) along with the cottage and surrounding pastures were being placed on the market. We were informed that the licence we had held since 1953 to use the Sanctuary would pass on to the new owner. The sale was completed in early March and on the following day the Society received notice to leave the Sanctuary. It was a sad day that ended a run of more than fifty years of observation and ringing studies at this site. Details of these activities in the Sanctuary, the characters involved and bird life of the copse were described in the Society's publication "Fifty Years of Birdwatching" (pp 26-49) and annually in the Society's report.

Although the six months notice period does not end until mid-September, those who work at the Sanctuary felt it would be better to leave the site and not disturb the new owner. Fortunately, with the help

of Brianne, and with kind permission from Pauline Bulman, Bursar of Lancing College (and help of Derek Cleaver, the farm manager), and Hugh Passmore of Applesham Farm, we have started ringing operations in Ladywells Valley. This is a private and quiet valley between Lancing College and Applesham Farm with a south bank of fairly mature wood. One sheep walk has a good understory of hawthorn, bramble and holly to act as background to mist nets. The valley is grazed by sheep and a reed-fringed stream runs through the grazed meadows. At the west end of the valley a pond has been created with surrounding willow and reed; this has many features similar to the habitat at the Sanctuary and may be a focus for migrating warblers during the migration seasons.

Only two ringing outings have been completed to date; the first on 24th March was very difficult! Ringers will know how difficult it is to start at a new site or run the first session in a new season and I had forgotten the pains of trying to erect mist-nets in new areas. To make matters worse there was a fairly stiff north wind blowing and this really caught the south slope of the valley. After 2.5 hours the four of us had managed to string an impressive line of 7 x 18 metre nets along a fairly broad path, but the wind blew the nets like spinnakers and the tension on the guys was enormous! Little chance of catching any birds I thought, but by the end of the morning 15 new birds had been trapped.

The second outing on 7th April was much more productive as 37 birds were ringed. It is early days and it will take many visits to get to know the valley and understand the behaviour of the birds here at various times of the year. I doubt, however, that I will ever get to know Ladywells as well as I knew the Sanctuary.

John Newnham

In recognition of John's outstanding contribution to our Society, SDOS members at the Sussex Ornithological Society Conference in January gave him a specially commissioned water colour of the Sanctuary by John Reaney, (and SOS gave him a President's Award). John's picture features a ringed Cetti's Warbler, one of the Sanctuary's rarer captures. During the ringing session the following morning, John and the team retrapped a Cetti's Warbler which they had ringed last November!

Among the birds recently netted at Ladywells was a Blackcap which had been ringed as a juvenile at the Sanctuary in July 2002.

The Atlas 2007-2011 : how you can help

The SDOS is supporting the Sussex Ornithological Society and the BTO with 'the big one', the survey that will update our knowledge of bird populations, and guide work to protect species and sites. This article is based on one in the SOS Newsletter by Helen Crabtree and Richard Cowser, Sussex Atlas Co-ordinators.

November 2007 sees the start of survey work for the Combined Winter and Breeding Bird Atlas, which will cover the whole of Great Britain and Ireland. Here in Sussex we will be surveying every tetrad in the county. Your help, either submitting records or helping with survey work, will be vital to the success of this project.

Submitting records

One way everyone can help is to send us records of the birds you see, common or rare, because your records will supplement the survey data, and help us produce more accurate distribution maps. Particularly useful will be species lists from your local wood/park/garden/field and from any walk you go on.

Many members don't currently send us records, so if you haven't done this before it's really quite simple.

The way we would prefer you to submit your records is by computer. SDOS and SOS share records. Our Data-base Manager is Dr John Newnham and he will shortly complete programming some changes to our Record Capture system, which will make it much simpler to enter the records of what birds you see. All you need is access to a PC. Just e-mail John (jnewnham@bigfoot.com) and he will send you the latest version of Record Capture, which comes with instructions on how to use it.

If you don't want to submit your records electronically then you can write them on a paper recording form. SDOS forms are available from our Recorder, Clive Hope, 22 Upper West Drive, Ferring, BN12 5RG.

The BTO will also be distributing forms for casual records, and some of you may also be inputting records to the BTO's Birdtrack system. If you send such data to the BTO there is no need to duplicate it by also sending the SDOS and SOS the same records, as we and the BTO will exchange all our data (including BBS and WeBS data).

Those of you who already have Record Capture will be offered the upgraded version. (The date when it is available will

be posted on the SOS website, so if you haven't heard anything by then contact John). The upgraded version will enable you to use the BTO two-letter codes when entering species, and locations can be entered by either one-km squares or tetrads, as well as by the preferred location.

Evidence of Breeding

One of the fields of data which is most often NOT filled in is the breeding status. It really would be helpful if, when submitting records during the breeding season, you tried to complete this data field.

The BTO has now given us preliminary guidance on the criteria to use during the Breeding Bird Atlas to say whether a species has possible, probable or confirmed breeding status. In summary they are as follows

Possible breeding

Single bird present in suitable nesting habitat. Singing male present in suitable nesting habitat.

Probable breeding

Pair in suitable nesting habitat
Courtship and display
Permanent territorial behaviour, e.g. song on at least two different days a week at same place

Confirmed breeding

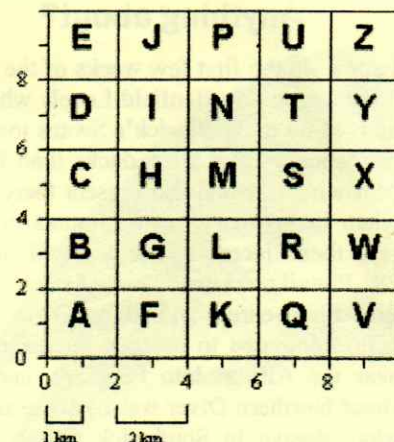
Nest building
Agitated behaviour or anxiety calls from adults (suggesting nest or young nearby)
Distraction display/feigning injury
Used nest or eggshells found
Recently fledged young or downy young seen, especially if still dependent on adults (e.g. feeding)

Adults entering or leaving nest

Adult carrying faecal sac or food for young
Nest containing eggs,
Nest with young seen or heard
A long list, but you will see that you don't have to find a nest to be able to record whether a bird is possibly, probably or definitely breeding.

What is a tetrad?

Like many BTO surveys the Atlas will use the Ordnance Survey National Grid as a means of identifying locations of bird records. There are various scales of resolution, but for the Atlas we are working with 10-km squares and tetrads. A 10-km square as its name suggests is a square 10 km by 10 km. A tetrad on the other hand is a collection of four 1-km squares arranged into a 2 km by 2 km square. There are 25 tetrads within each 10-km square and these are labelled A to Z, excluding O (to avoid confusion with zero), from bottom left (SW) to top right (NE). The figure shows this diagrammatically. A tetrad is then given its full reference as the 10-km square code followed by the tetrad letter.



Correctly reading grid references is crucial for many BTO surveys. All British grid references should begin with two letters, which are followed by a series of numbers (and/or the tetrad code). Correct examples of grid references are:

TQ32 identifies a 10km square

TQ3025 identifies a 1km square

TQ306254 identifies a point to the nearest 100m

TQ32C identifies a tetrad

Volunteering

Maybe you've already volunteered to help with the tetrad surveys for the Atlas 2007-2011? If not, please do! Either way, find yourself an up to date map of the area you would like to survey. Part of the fun of Atlas projects is poring over maps, deciding on the best route to take you past this pond, or that promising-looking wood. Ordnance Survey Landranger maps (1:50,000) or Ordnance Survey Pathfinder maps (1:25,000) are perfect. Using the diagram above, you can work out which tetrad you live in, or which tetrad your favourite local patch falls within. Then you can let us know which tetrads you would like to survey. SOS has a Steward for each 10-km square, who plans the survey activity in each square, so we will liaise with the appropriate Steward and pass on your preferences to him/her. If you have problems using the tetrad codes, please feel free to simply describe the area you would like to survey!

If you would be willing to survey a tetrad or tetrads, please contact the Sussex Atlas Co-ordinator, Helen Crabtree (hcrabtree@gmail.com), or Keith Noble, who is the Steward for the square which includes Shoreham,

Please send items for the next Newsletter by August 10th to the Editor:

**Keith Noble, 19 Roman Road,
STEYNING,**

BN44 3FN,

Email: noble@karg.freemove.co.uk

Tales out of school 10

International Links

Please be patient with my preamble...the birds will fly in later!

Matthew Barrow was recommended to me as an expert on Kenya and so it was arranged for him to talk to each of the four classes in my year group. His illustrated presentation was fascinating and the children were captivated by the many artefacts he brought along. It was later over a staffroom cuppa that I discovered his true motivation for some seventeen visits in six years. Matthew is an evangelical Christian with a determination to make a difference to the tens of thousands of homeless "street children" in Kenya. In 2002 he succeeded in opening a hostel for such children, initially boys, at Koma Ranch, a largely rural area some 35 kilometres north east of Nairobi.

Meanwhile I began organising small but regular fund-raising activities at my school to support the building of the hostel. Then, when the new residents of the hostel began attending the local primary school we also established educational links. The 435 pupils at Koma Ranch Primary make it a similar size to my own establishment but at the link school everyone arrives on foot. The school has no electricity and the single tap has an erratic water supply from a well pump. The classroom windows are unglazed and most floors are just bare earth. Typically classes have more than 50 pupils; often three children share one desk.

How do I know such intimate details? Well last March Shena and I funded our own visit to Koma Ranch. We stayed at the spartan hostel which enabled us to spend a week teaching at the school. Our own Worthing pupils and their families donated a range of items so we were able to deliver a large box of stationery and healthcare products to the school.

Pupils at the Kenyan school range from 4 to 16 years and those of 9 years and over receive the majority of their lessons in English. Shena and I were quickly put to work and soon developed a good team-teaching style. The pupils were keen to know about England and our interests. So bring on the birds! Shena's artistic abilities shone through even on the rough blackboard with poor quality chalk and we were soon delivering a variety of lessons on common British birds and migration. Fortunately a couple of days before our visit the 'Independent' newspaper had produced a fine poster showing the migratory bird routes to/from Africa. Indeed migration was in full swing dur-

ing our stay and we were able to point to the evidence outside the classroom in the form of Barn Swallows and the occasional late Northern Wheatears. We stressed the importance of Africa to bird migration and it was wonderful to discuss "our" birds. Well, theirs or ours? We left that open but by the end of our stay the pupils were better aware of the significance of African avian life.

We returned to Worthing with dozens of digital images to share with our pupils. As a result of the visit there is now a greater understanding of the African conditions and a strong motivation to do more to help the Kenyan school. The number of pupils seeking a pen-pal has also dramatically increased and batches of letters are now airmailed from Worthing each month. The correspondence has led to a sharing of interests, ideas and culture and done much to improve geographical perceptions at both schools. £10 buys pencils & pens for a whole class. £100 pays for the concreting of a classroom floor. Any size donations gratefully received.

John Maskell

Extracts from 'History of BRIGHTHEMSTON'

by John Ackerson Erredge, published 1862.

I borrowed this old book recently, and whilst the main part of the book is concerned with the history of old Brighton, I was surprised to find chapters on birds, plants and butterflies. It is unclear whether these chapters were based on information supplied by experts in their fields or from the author's knowledge. Wherever the text was gleaned, it makes interesting reading.

"The Birds in their Haunts in the neighbourhood of Brighton.

The Sussex coast is a favourite locality particularly with migratory species. The high headlands to the eastward seem to be a great attraction to them by day, and, as a great many take nocturnal flight, the glare of light at night sent high into the vault of the heavens from gas lamps in the town of Brighton, attracts a great number to this neighbourhood, and many rare specimens have been obtained.

Several specimens of White-tailed Eagle (*falco albicilla*) have been shot in the immediate neighbourhood, and the parties have always fancied they have been lucky enough to obtain the Golden Eagle. A gentleman from Brighton, being at Shoreham some years ago, just after the landlord of the Dolphin Inn had shot

what he considered was the Golden Eagle, somewhat surprised the imagined lucky shot by assuring him that it showed too much of its legs, and that it was an immature specimen of the Sea Eagle.

By means of a derrick, a great many eggs of the Willock (*urina troili*) and Razorbill (*alca torda*) are taken; these birds breed on the cliffs at Beachy Head in great numbers every year. These cliffs are likewise the resort and breeding place of a great many Jackdaws (*corvus monedula*). Sixty years ago the Red-legged Crow, or Cornish Chough (*pyrrhocorax graculus*) was common here, though now the species is nearly or quite extinct all along our southern shores.

The Buzzard (*falco buteo*) is one of our indigenous birds which has nearly disappeared from the district, and what was many years ago called the Common Buzzard, is now very rare. They were formerly frequently met with amongst the furze near the edge of the cliffs, where they were constantly at war with the Jackdaws.

The Common Redstart (*sylvia phenicurus*) is a summer visitor, generally arriving about the second week of April. Their migration seems to be gregarious, as they are met with in flocks of ten or a dozen, close by the seashore, a little westward of Brighton. In a day or two, they distribute themselves all over the country, and are hardly ever seen again. The country people call it the Fire Tail.

The Grasshopper Warbler (*sylvia locustella*) is a very shy bird and consequently is rarely seen. It is a great ventriloquist and its note is exactly like the grasshopper only much louder. It is not a scarce bird and several nests of it have been found at the Holm-Bush, and almost any fine evening in June it may be heard there.

The Nightingale (*sylvia luscini*) is the most musical, most melancholy of birds, the poet's bird par excellence. On Poyning's Common, through May, they may be heard in the greatest perfection, where they tune their melodies nocturnal love-song through the livelong night. They generally arrive about the second week in April."

Not surprisingly, most of the scientific names have been changed over subsequent years. Local place names are mentioned such as Devils Dyke, as a favourite haunt of Wheatears, and the waders that are attracted to little bays and inlets between Brighton and Shoreham Harbour.

There are some strange omissions, considering our location beside the sea, such

the absence of any text concerning the commoner gulls and terns, and hardly any information on the finch family.

I hope readers find these extracts interesting and I will follow up with a second instalment in a future newsletter. There won't be space to mention chapters on butterflies and plants, but if anyone would care to contact me I can provide copies of the relevant pages. For the record, the population of Brighton in 1860 was 77,000.

Peter Whitcomb

Madagascar

As a compulsive 'lister' (shopping list, 'jobs to do' list, birding year list) it is inevitable that I have a list, sometimes written and sometimes in my mind, of places I want to visit for new birding experiences (new birds to add to another list).

There are several African countries, a couple in Asia, several in South America and even one in Europe (Finland) that I always reel out whenever asked where I plan to go next. Just as inevitably, there are places that are not on my 'list' that suddenly find themselves at the top, that 'jump the queue' so to speak. Madagascar was one such country. Although I was fully aware of the potential, I had never really considered going there until, that is, I got talking to the Tropical Birding team during a holiday to Ecuador. I came back from that holiday with the seed of Madagascar sown and that seed grew into a firm plan, a proposed itinerary and a party of five of us who wanted to go. All that remained was to identify the company we'd go with and therefore consolidate the itinerary.

One bird, not on many standard programmes, stood out as an essential target. That bird was *Euryceros prevostii*, the Helmet Vanga. It has a very restricted range in Madagascar and that meant including Masoala. It was possible but at a cost, financially of course but more critically in time. The most compact tour that included the best spread of locations and therefore the greatest potential coverage of the Madagascar endemics was the tour offered by Birding Africa. A 21-day programme covered all but one of the main eco-tourist spots (no Berenty) and included both northwest and northeast key areas. Stories about the degradation of Berenty and the tameness of the ring-tailed lemurs there countered this site as being the easiest place for one or two endemic birds, in particular Giant Coua and White-browed Owl. However, there

were other possibilities for these and the compromise was agreed, no Berenty but time to include Ampijoroa and Masoala as well as the essential sites of Ifaty, Perinet and Ranomafana.

The trip, with four family members and one good friend from several previous trips, including the 'seed' trip to Ecuador, became reality in November 2006. It was a standard Birding Africa itinerary but with one day added (having five members which, at time of booking were the only participants signed up, carries some weight) to give us an extra day at Ifaty so we could include the boat trip to see Red-tailed Tropicbird. Our leader was the best we could hope for, Callan Cohen, co-author of the recently published 'Southern Africa Birdfinder' that includes his major section on Madagascar.

The trip was a success. We missed a few endemics, less than most other groups with the same programme in a similar time scale. The group saw all of the individual members of the five endemic families, although I personally missed Bernier's Vanga. We did, however, make up for the gaps with some less-than-easy support species, Meller's Duck in a totally unexpected fly-past, Reunion Harrier at the exact point where Callan told us to look out for Reunion Harrier, kilometre marker 662. And the five Madagascar Sandgrouse flying in to drink at the normal stake-out pool seconds before we prepared to leave 'empty-handed' for breakfast. The dilemma of whether or not to take the extra day for the non-endemic Red-tailed Tropicbird was vindicated when I decided to walk round the small island (Nosy Ve) and, joined by my son Ben, we added one of the least expected birds of the trip, Sooty Gull. This is a rare vagrant to Madagascar and created enough excitement for Callan to persuade the reluctant boatmen to take our transport round the island on our return trip to the mainland so that the whole group saw the bird.

Our views of Schlegel's Asity at Ampijoroa were phenomenal considering this was a bird for which a single sighting is considered success. We saw seven including three stunning males. We saw all the ground-rollers more easily than expected so that, by the time we reached Masoala, the reputed easiest place for three of them, we'd already seen all five. Just as well, because they certainly didn't look easy at Masoala although, admittedly, we were concentrating by then on the Helmet Vanga and that certainly wasn't as easy as we'd expected.

And just for the record, we were in Antananarivo (Tana) at the same time as a reported attempted coup. We found out about it a week after we returned home so, as you can imagine, it was both unsuccessful and pretty much a non-event.

Trevor Rackstraw

(If you would like to read Trevor's full day-by-day account of this trip, please ask the Newsletter Editor)

RPs and LRPs

A national survey of nesting Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers is taking place this summer. In Sussex it is organised by the SOS Surveys Officer, Dr. Tony Cocks, with the 10km square Stewards.

Little Ringed Plovers rarely breed in our area, but Ringed Plovers certainly try along the beach and at Widewater, despite disturbance by people and dogs. To support the survey, please report promptly your observations of possible, probable and proved breeding to the Recorder or your Steward.

Garden Birds

Martin Ford says that members who send him SDOS Garden Bird Survey forms sometimes report other birds, including unusual species flying over. Your Newsletter Editor, for instance, has recently watched passing Red Kites and Buzzards, as he lives under the flyways up and down and across the Adur valley. Martin asks you to report your extra sightings to the Recorder for use in the Annual Report.

Marion Taylor writes that her daughter has a large pond in Crowborough and problems with herons. One day her son-in-law heard an unusual commotion, and looking out of the window, saw a heron and a cat arguing over a fish that lay on the lawn between them. He went out, shooed them both away and got rid of the fish.

Special Offer

The price of our anniversary book, 'Fifty Years of Birdwatching' has been dropped to just £5. Books are on sale at the April AGM and other indoor meetings.

Future Newsletters

Your Editor hopes to have the next issue in September available by email, saving paper, and in some cases postage or hand delivery. If you would like to receive the Newsletter in this way, please email Keith Noble:

noble@karg.freereserve.co.uk.