

S HOREHAM D ISTRIC O RNITHOLOGICAL S OCIETY

SPRING 2011 NEWSLETTER

Summer Outings 2011

June 5th (Sun) Blackdown Hill.

Meet 09:00 at Blackdown National Trust car park.

O.S. sheet 186. Ref. SU920309 - Dist. 4K (2).

Leader: Bernie Forbes 01903 753876.

Jun 18th (Sat) Warnham Local Nature Reserve.

Meet 09:30 in the reserve car park north-west of Horsham, just off the A24 on the B2237(am only).

OS Sheet 187. Ref. TQ167323—Dist. 3K (1).

Leader: Brianne Reeve 01273 452497.

Jul 10th (Sun) Cocking Down (Jointly with S.O.S).

Meet 09:00 in the car park on the west side of the road south of village.

O.S. sheet 197. Ref. SU875166—Dist 5K(1-2).

Leader: Bernie Forbes 01903 753876.

Aug 20th (Sat) Chantry and Kithurst.

Meet 09:00 at car park at the top of Chantry Lane east of Storrington (am only).

O.S. sheet 197. Ref. TQ087119—Dist 4K (2).

Leader: Clive Hope 01903 700498.

Aug 26th(Fri) Pulborough Brooks for Waders.

Meet 18:45 in RSPB car park. (Evening only).

O.S. sheet 197. Ref. TQ059164—Dist 3K (1).

Leader: Bernie Forbes 01903 753876.

Sep 3rd (Sat) Adur Valley—river walk

Meet 09:00 in lay-by just north of old Cement Works (am only).

O.S. Sheet 198 Ref TQ197094—Dist 5K (2) 2 stiles.

Leader: Chris Wright 01903 814859

Sep 11th (Sun) Pagham, Sidlesham and Church Norton.

Meet 09:00 in Sidlesham Visitor centre car park.

O.S. Sheet 197 Ref. SZ857965—Dist. 4-5K (1).

Leader Dave Smith and Dorian Mason 01903 700456

Local Bird Notes by John Ford

I always open my bedroom curtains carefully in order not to disturb the birds on my nut feeders. One morning in mid January I opened them to find a somewhat strange sight. The light wasn't very good and at first I thought it was a large bat I was looking at. Closer inspection revealed it was a crow, hanging upside down from a branch of my apple tree. Its wings were folded and it was quite still, apart from its head which was turning slowly from side to side. It continued to do this for several minutes, inspecting the new upside down world that it had discovered. Eventually it dropped to the ground and ambled away across the garden. I am still wondering as to how it got upside down in the first place.

We had a good crop of Bramley apples last year and for want of storage in the garage and shed decided to store them on shelving above the wood shed. Since Christmas many have started to decay but we still left them on the shelving. We soon found that they were being attacked and knocked to the ground. As a result we have been throwing them across the lawn and have had the pleasure of Redwings, Song Thrushes and Blackbirds coming daily to feed. At the end of January we still have 2 thrushes and 5 blackbirds visiting daily.

So, can I put in a plea to any of you who have apple trees and who don't usually save many apples; think again. Find somewhere to store the apples until wintertime and help keep the numbers up on your Garden Bird Count.

John Ford

IN CLAW AND SWEET TOOTH

So far in my life I've been rescued by the US Navy from a sinking yacht in the middle of the Atlantic, spent a night roped to a narrow ledge on the north face of Y Lliwedd... and even ridden my mountain bike along the A23. But still it seems that when friends ask, "why ring birds?" and I answer, "cos I enjoy the danger" they tend to give me a look which suggests they've decided my tongue-in-cheekfulness is terrific, as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh used to say.

Now where two or three bird ringers are gathered together with real ale and organic sandwiches there is an inevitability about the way the conversation will turn to tales of the more well armed and aggressive species they have encountered. And it's not just ringers: whenever I mentioned my Barrie Watson, Barn Owl monitoring activities to my late father-in-law he'd always warn me about losing an eye, Eric Hosking style. No matter that it was a completely different species that launched Hosking's photographic career: an owl was an owl and an eye was an eye as far as father-in-law was concerned.

The truth is that Barn Owls are relatively placid and anyway a tentative peck from a Barn Owl's bill will probably not even pierce your skin. Their claws, on the other hand, are not to be underestimated. I learned this when one adult locked all four talons deep into the fleshier part of my index finger, hit some nerve, and left me with a partially numb hand for a fortnight.

In May last year a fine and fierce Tawny Owl, the first I'd encountered, found itself in one of our mist nets at Ladywells and it was my honour to put a ring on it, measure the length of its wing, determine its weight, and so on. Mindful of my father-in-law's warnings and only having to touch the bird bag to be attacked through the fabric it was pretty clear that this owl was going to be a rather more dangerous proposition than any of its very distant *Tyto alba* cousins. 'Controlled trepidation' just about sums up the way I approached the task.

One useful tactic was to ease just one leg out of the bag and pop the ring onto this - that way I only had a third of the Tawny Owl's armaments to think about at one time. Of course, it was important to first double-check that the bird wasn't already wearing a ring on its other leg

- sending a bird off with a ring on both legs tends to be a bit embarrassing. These are the kinds of things you learn when you're a trainee ringer and going through your Kestrel and Sparrowhawk ringing rites of passage. (Ah, those halcyon days when you tried to fool/impress your trainer by waiting until he'd set off on a net round before you reached for the anti-septic wipes and the sticking plasters!)

But even when you're no longer a trainee, there's always something to learn. For instance, while ringing in Turkey last autumn I failed completely to prevent the first Red-backed Shrike I have ever ringed from making a bit of a feast of the 'quick' (that tasty fleshy bit between the fingernail and the skin) of the fingers of my left hand. Afterwards, cheerful Turkish grins all round, I was informed that this is very much the preferred attack point when a shrike is defending itself against a human.

The other, potentially much more serious, Turkish experience last autumn was handling the only Bittern I have ever seen, let alone ringed. Have a look at this YouTube footage: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBHb_dZZZwA About halfway through the clip the Minsmere Bittern spears a fish with a lightning thrust of its bill. As I say I'd never managed to see one of these birds at Minsmere or anywhere else and hadn't seen the movie either, so while preparing to weigh and measure the hefty bird I'd just eased out of one of Janet's pillowcases (quickly commandeered because we hadn't any bird bags big enough), I didn't really think about how long a Bittern's neck might be, or the speed at which it might strike out with that long sharp spearhead of a bill. This was the closest I have yet come to an Eric Hosking moment. Ah, the satisfying danger of it all!

But just in case any reader is thinking of training to ring I should probably end this piece by saying that the vast majority of species won't even have a bit of a peck at you, let alone break through the skin barrier. And of course everything is carefully controlled and supervised these days, health and safety, blah blah. One exception is Blue Tits, they'll always have a go, regardless of HSE regulations... but I've already written of the virtues of Blue Tits. No, the greatest danger a trainee ringer will face - at Ladywells at any rate - is French Fancies. Mr Kipling's Cakes, Chrissi's Stick-To-Your-Ribs Flapjack, Janet's Politically Correct Fairtrade Chocolate Brownies, Barrie's Chocolate Digestives... is there no end to it? These days we seem to be achieving levels of carbo-loading that marathon runners can only dream of. All that fat and sugar and cholesterol and whatnot - we'll be

lucky to survive the summer.

John Crix
February 2010



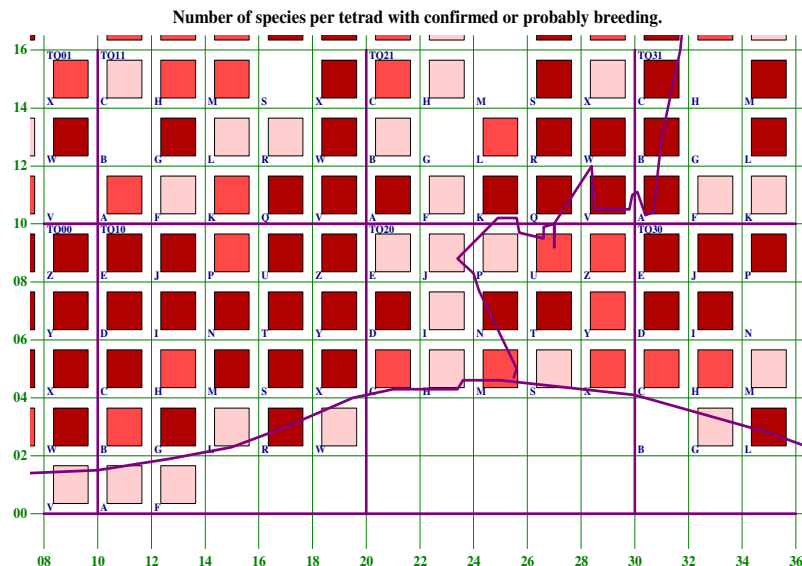
The Breeding Season Survey – the final effort.

This four year national survey is now nearing completion; the winter surveying has finished, the remaining Timed Tetrad Visits (TTV) are organised and some very interesting maps are emerging from the vast number of records collected. The enthusiasm with which this atlas has been embraced is astounding and coverage nationally and across Sussex has been fantastic. Throughout the survey the progress and presentation of the results at a county level can be seen on the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) website at www.sos.org.uk and this will continue during the final breeding season.

What then is there left to do in this final breeding season which starts on April 1st? The challenge, and not an easy one, is to be able to confirm breeding for as many species as possible in all our local tetrads (2 x 2 kilometre grid square). In most instances species which occur regularly have been recorded but in many tetrads these records imply non-breeding or only possibly breeding. It takes time, often repeated visits and obsessional recording, to find evidence of probable or confirmed breeding; this is the challenge. Many useful records could be gleaned from observation in the garden or on local walks. The table below shows the allowable codes and how these will be interpreted in the final analysis. The following map shows our society's recording area divided into tetrads with symbols representing the number of species, with either probable or confirmed breeding evidence, recorded. The dark squares (47%) are tetrads with more than 25 species, the mid-red squares (19%) represent 20-25 species, the pink squares (23%) show 10-19 species and the blank tetrads (11%) are those with less than 10 species recorded. Although a couple of these tetrads have very little land it is unlikely all of

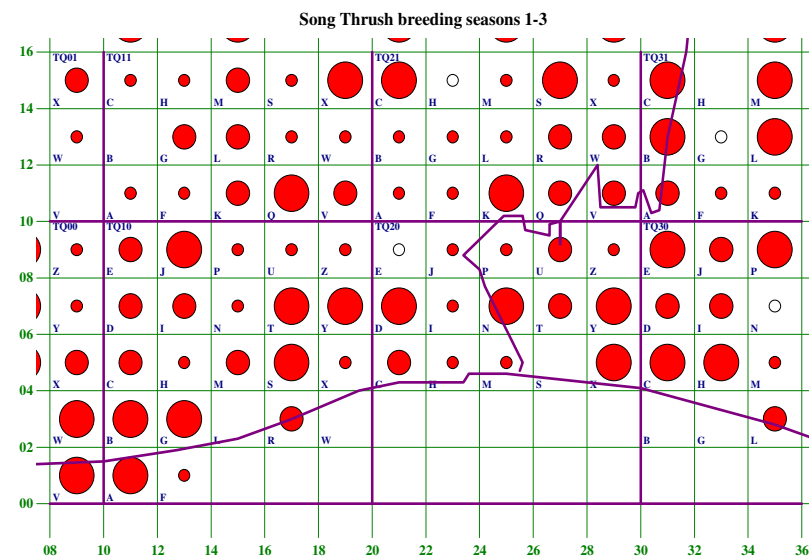
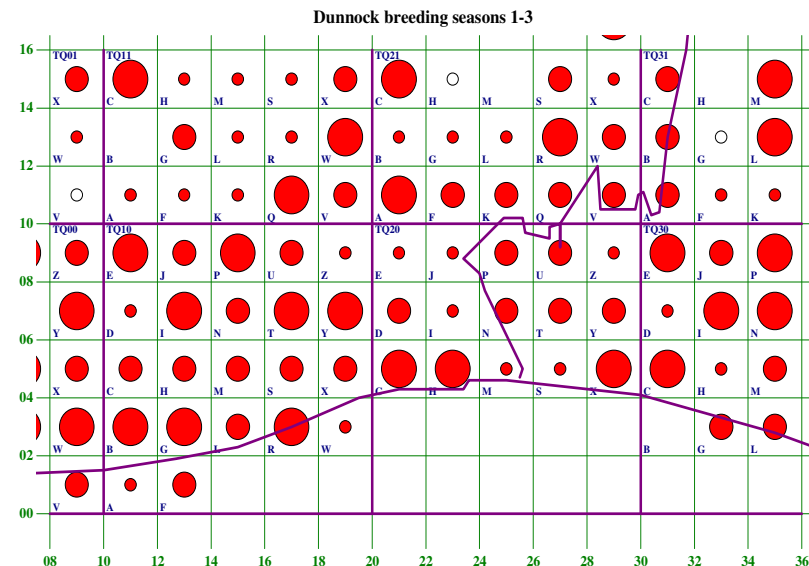
the white and pink coloured tetrads have such poor habitat to only support a small variety of breeding birds. These areas clearly need more surveying this coming season

Confirmed Breeding	Probably Breeding	Possibly Breeding	Non-Breeding
(large filled or red symbol)	(middle filled or red symbol)	(small filled or red symbol)	(small open or green symbol)
DD Distraction display or injury feigning	P Pair in suitable habitat	H Observation in suitable habitat	M Migrant record
UN Used nest or recent broken egg-shell	T Territory holding 1+ week apart	S Singing male or breeding calls	U Non-breeding summering record
FL Recently fledged young	D Display observed in habitat		F Flyover and not using tetrad
ON Occupied nest	N Visiting probable nest site		
FF Faecal sac or food carrying to nest	A Agitated behaviour suggestive of nesting		
NE Nest with eggs	I Incubation patch (mainly for ringers)		
NY Nest with young	B Nest building or hole excavation		

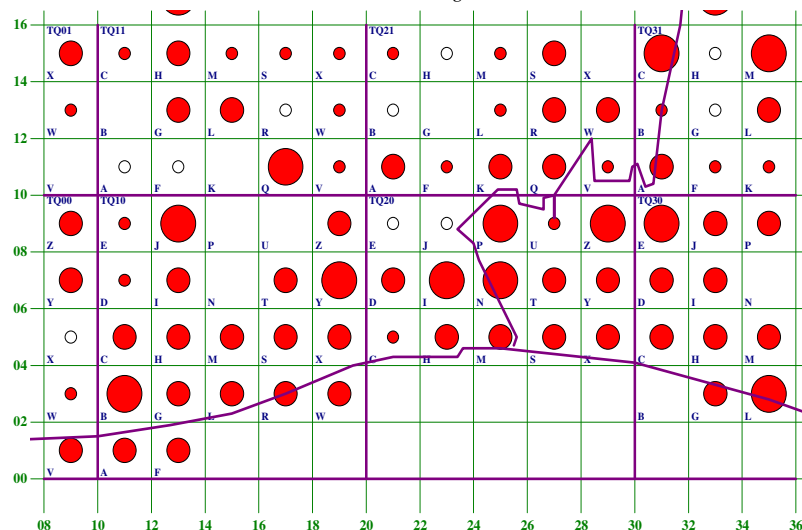


Looking at some species reveals more closely how well breeding status is being recorded. In the following small selection of maps the large red circle represents confirmed breeding, the middle sized red circle probably breeding, the small red circle possibly breeding and the open small circle indicates the species has been recorded but no breeding evidence is attached to any records. The first pair of maps is for species, Dunnock and Song Thrush, which are likely to be breeding species in many of our member's gardens. Are you able to provide records to increase the size of the symbol and confirm breeding is (or has) taken place?

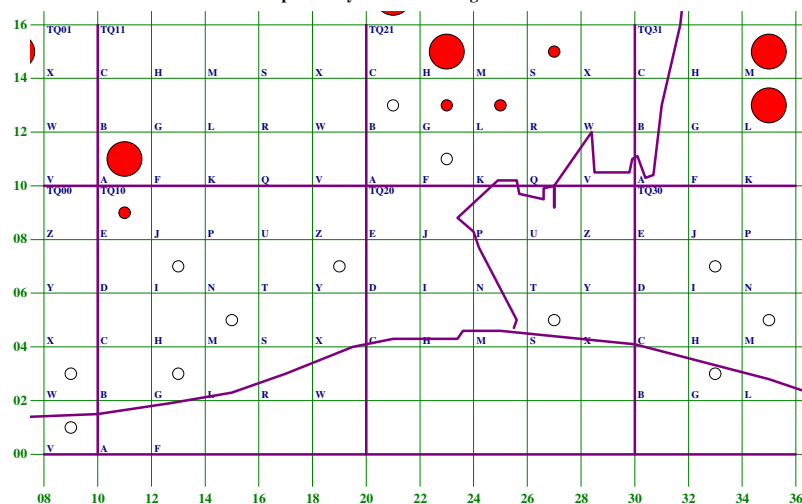
Collared Dove is a noisy, conspicuous species frequently found in association with buildings and gardens yet it appears that confirming breeding poses a real problem. Clearly many Collared Doves have been recorded holding territory or displaying but only in about 12% of the tetrads in our area has breeding been confirmed. Are their nests so difficult to see and do we seldom see recently fledged young? At the other end of the spectrum Spotted Flycatchers have declined significantly. Across the entire county this species has been found as either probably or confirmed breeding in 10% of tetrads whilst in our recording area, so far, it is only about 5%.



Collared Dove breeding seasons 1-3



Spotted Flycatcher breeding seasons 1-3



So how can you help? There remains time to contribute but it is running out. The key to achieving the most complete distribution maps with good evidence of breeding is to encourage as many observers as possible to assiduously record and log their observations for everything they see. In particular ensure that an appropriate breeding status code is entered correctly. Look regularly at the Atlas section on the SOS website to see where you birding can count for more. Often records from a garden or something seen whilst out and about not necessarily whilst bird-watching may fill a space.

Why not consider spending some mornings bird-watching in one of the local squares with fewer breeding species recorded rather than travelling to one of the county's well watched sites such as Pagham Harbour or Pulborough Brooks; you may see fewer birds but what you see (and record) will be of more value to the Atlas.

The other important point is to submit records in a way they will be assimilated into the Atlas; sightings which remain in an observers head or notebook will neither help this project nor the various conservation bodies which will benefit from the atlas work. The easiest way to record is on-line through the website of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) (<http://www.bto.org.uk/>) either through Birdtrack or roving records in the Atlas part of the website. Alternatively all records, with appropriate breeding status codes, supplied to the SOS or through our society's Hon Recorder, will be passed to the BTO. If past records are still in your notebook then it is still not too late to pass these on.

All the records gathered in this survey have already been used in the species accounts which appear in the annual Sussex and Shoreham District bird report.

The final results will take some while to gather and validate but thereafter the SOS plan to produce two publications. Sometime in 2012 the full set of maps will be produced on a CD and then in 2014 a full county avifauna will be published. In this the results of the Atlas will be fully analysed along with many other features of Sussex birding.

John Newnham
March 2011

Outings Reports by Noranne Buddulph

Henfield Farmland and River Walk Sunday 9th January

Seventeen SDOS members plus 3 dogs assembled next to the Cat & Canary in Henfield for a walk led by Val Bentley and Nigel Parsons on a sunny and still morning. The group headed down the old railway line towards Stretham on the Downlink path and saw many of the common species. Two Great Spotted Woodpeckers were heard drumming, one quite close at hand. On the flooded fields between the railway line and Rye Farm there were a few ducks including Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler and Gadwall but there were sounds of distant shooting, and no geese were to be seen.

In order to find the Geese it was decided to head back along the railway line, where a small monkey puzzle tree yielded a Coal Tit and Goldcrest, and walk up to Betley Bridge, from where we could see the geese in the fields to the west. We ventured a little way along the river bank, being overtaken by 4 Bewick's Swans in flight which disappeared to the south. The geese were mainly Canada and Greylag Geese, with a couple of strange farmyard-type hybrids, but 4 Barnacle Geese were in among them sticking closely together, and there were more Wigeon and a male Pintail with a couple of females. No sign of any White-fronts though. A female Reed Bunting was perched on top of a bush just the other side of the river. The light was excellent as we viewed the geese and ducks and the 'scopes were well used. Forty one species were listed.

Beeding Brooks - Sunday 16th Jan

Terry Goble met about fifteen members at 2pm on Pound Lane. Despite a forecast suggesting heavy rain the sky was mostly blue but with a strong wind. Before leaving, a mixed flock of Redwing and Fieldfare flew over the tops of the nearby houses. As we walked up the lane it was evident that there was not a great deal of activity but various common species were seen or heard including a small party of Goldfinches flying around overhead. A distant flood was viewed with telescopes and Herring, Black-headed, Common and Lesser Black-backed Gulls noted. There were a number of common Corvids, Woodpigeons and a single Grey

Heron flew over. Towards Small Dole the land fill hosted a spectacular number of Starlings, Gulls and Corvids. Apart from the odd Meadow Pipit there were few birds to be found in the fields. A flock of 20-30 Lapwings were a welcome sight.

We then had the first of two sightings of Short-eared Owls. The first was flushed from a grassy tussock and gave good views as it flew to the back off the brooks and landed in the grass. Soon after a second Short-eared Owl flew out of a Hawthorn Tree and flew towards the river disappearing into some shrubs.

A Water Rail was briefly seen by Brianne before walking south along the river bank to view the floods. One Bewick Swan was spotted among the Mute Swans and good views were had of Fieldfares and Redwings.

A Barn Owl had been reported by a local dog walker but we were not so lucky! However, a male Tawny Owl was heard calling by Beeding church. Terry was surprised that we did not see Snipe, Bullfinch, Skylark, Buntings, Stonechat, Buzzard and Kestrel but everyone enjoyed a lovely afternoon spent with knowledgeable and keen birders.

Rackham Woods - Sunday 27th February

On a fine sunny morning Bernie Forbes met 22 Shoreham members in the car park by the Old School House. The air was full of bird song and over two hours was spent birding in the woods at a slow pace. We could hear Goldcrest and heard and watched several Treecreepers busy feeding as well as Blue and Great Tits foraging in the trees. We heard whistling Nuthatch, cooing Stock Dove and the brief hoots of a Tawny Owl. Siskin could be heard although actually finding them proved difficult, the number estimated was about 20 or so as they buzzed around the canopy.

Out on the Brooks there were still plenty of winter floods. There were several hundred Wigeon and Teal and good number of Shoveler with at least three Pintail Ducks. A small party of about six Black-tailed Godwits and a lone Little Grebe were found out on the flood. Dozens of dark Fallow Deer were grazing the higher ground on the peat bog and at one time we logged seven Common Buzzards up in the thermals over the brooks. The highlight of the morning was the pair of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker that appeared briefly near the road before melting away into thick cover.

We relocated to the high down land above North Stoke and took our

lunch with stunning views down the Arun valley. With the weather forecast predicting rain we soon started our walk around The Burgh with a Barn Owl flying over the main track and disappearing into a line of ivy clad trees. A calling Grey Partridge was already paired up and we had good close views of them as well as a few Red-legged. In the surrounding hedgerows a Corn Bunting, nine Linnet and a few Yellowhammers were seen by all. Three hares were squatting at the edge of one of the fields and were seen well through the telescope. A Kestrel was found and plenty of Common Buzzards were seen in the far distance. Checking the wood on the return journey we disturbed a Tawny Owl from its day time roost and the some of the party had 10 Fieldfare and a single Redwing just before the rain came. We managed to get back to our cars before it poured down finishing at around 1430hrs, in all a very enjoyable day's birding.

Impromptu New Forest Meeting - Saturday 19th March

The day started with heavy frost and a liberal dose of windscreen de-icer but soon brightened and warmed up to give a glorious warm, sunny day, only the second day this year when the winter coat could be left in the car. Five members joined Russ Tofts for our usual visit to the New Forest where a number of Hawfinch showed themselves either in flight or perched up briefly, probably totalling 4-6 birds. Three Woodlarks song-flighted overhead and a single Mistle Thrush sang. Curlews bubbled and a couple of Lapwings displayed in the distance. The raptors were very slow to get going, possibly due to the clear, windless conditions but eventually put on a good but distant show. We must have had 30+ Buzzards during the day, including birds seen en-route.

At Blashford Lakes HWT, facilities were used, lunch eaten and a good variety of waterfowl seen, the best being 40+ Goosanders. Sadly, we were a couple of days too early for the usual Little Ringed Plovers; only Lapwing and Redshank featured. Two smart Mediterranean Gulls were seen and we finally tracked down one of the two Black-necked Grebes which were present.

In the Woodland area the number of small birds had plummeted that week but close views were enjoyed of 10+ Bramblings, and a few Siskins and Lesser Redpolls, the latter featuring a 'candyfloss-pink' breasted

male. Finally, half a dozen very distant dots were possibly 'eye-floaters', mosquitoes or Sand Martins!! A modest 69 bird species were recorded plus Brimstone and two Pike!

Goring Seawatch - Sunday 17th April

About a dozen members joined John Newnham at the Alinora shelter for the annual spring sea-watch outing. Perhaps the date was a week or so earlier than usual but with a forecast of light east winds there was some hope of birds passing offshore. As it turned out there was no wind and the visibility was not too good either. In the period between 0800 and 1100hrs, when just three members remained, very few birds passed by. There were a few small, distant parties of Common Scoters, occasional party of Whimbrels, two flocks of Brent Geese and the occasional Sandwich Tern. Perhaps the birds of the outing were some superb summer-plumaged Mediterranean Gulls which passed by, usually in pairs, and often initially located by their characteristic "cat-like" call. Perhaps next year will be better!

Impromptu outing to Anchor Bottom Wednesday 4th May

Twelve members met Brianne Reeve at Dacre Gardens. Although the wind had lessened overnight, it had been a very cold start to the day. However, as we gathered at Anchor Bottom the sun was shining with the promise of real warmth. A Blackcap was singing well against the traffic noise as we went into the valley. Immediately, in the hedge to our right a Lesser Whitethroat's staccato notes were heard. There was a small colony of House Sparrows by the gate. A Blackbird sang nearby and then we heard the sweet calls of three Swallows. Walking up the centre of the valley we heard the call of a Yellowhammer and then found a fine male atop a low bush. Suddenly we heard, quite clearly this time, the preamble and then the strong 'rattle' of another Lesser Whitethroat repeated several times. A pair of Stonechats was spotted moving through the bushes on the hillside and Meadow Pipit joined in the melee of song. Having reached the fence which divides the valley we found two 'nests' of the Peacock butterfly with recently hatched caterpillars on a patch of Stinging Nettles. A superb adult male Linnet was showing well on the top of a Hawthorn bush and two others, less colourful perched on the fence.

It was a little too cold to hope to see any blue butterfly species, though we did have a brief glimpse of a Common as we climbed up the north-facing slope. It was here that we found the patches of Green-winged Orchids in colour forms from deep purple, shades of pink and through to pure white.

It is a steep climb to the top path running parallel with the quarry where we found the rare Red Star Thistle which grows in such profusion in this valley. A Common Buzzard flew low into the valley and settled in a fairly small tree. A very short distance on we had the great delight of watching a Green Hairstreak butterfly sunning itself. It was much admired with its incredible enamel-green wings and striped black and white legs and antennae. We could hear the songs of Common Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Chaffinch and Chiffchaff and were able to get good views of all these birds but yet another Lesser Whitethroat was less obliging. The Willow Warbler had been using a pylon as its song-post for the previous three weeks and seemed to collect food from it too. The Chiffchaff up on a power line had a comforting 'prrrt prrrt' answering call from its mate (I believe!) each time it finished its repetitive song.

The gronk of a Raven drew our attention to a far pylon to the west and we walked back to look over into the quarry adding Speckled Wood and Wall butterflies to the record. The Ravens had been carefully watched since February and the culmination of the flight of the first chick had only happened that week. It was a very encouraging sight to see three young within the nest and a young bird balancing in a bush a little way from the nest with the adult (probably female) a few feet away. Another adult bird flew past us several times demonstrating its superb flying skills. A new mix of members had made this a most enjoyable visit.

Nightingale Walk - Friday 6th May

They were singing well tonight on the outing to Woods Mill. As the nineteen members joined Val Bentley and walked along the path from the car park, the first two singing males were not in full voice, but as we approached Little Meadow one was singing heartily by the bridge, with another just beyond. In the next meadow two were in competition about 20 yards apart, allowing us to enjoy the amazing variations in pitch, rhythm and volume that these amazing birds can produce. As we started out there were other species singing with Blackcap, Song Thrush, Blackbird, and Whitethroat all competing. But gradually they fell silent, and

by the time we left even the Nightingales were having a bit of a rest. We looked at the newly installed meanders in the stream running through the land purchased in 2007. The work has made things look very bare, especially with the lack of rain during the last month or so.

Chris brought along a dead Raven which had been found in the cement works in the afternoon. It looked like a young bird as the primary feathers were all still in pin at the base - so maybe an injudicious juvenile flying attempt had made it come to grief?

Impromptu outings to Anchor Bottom Wednesday 4th May/Monday 9th May

Reports for these outings will appear in the next newsletter.

Summer Picnic

The Summer Picnic will take place at The Old Rectory, Coombes on Sunday, July 17th from 12.30pm.
Please contact Brianne for details on 01273 452 497 or briannereeve@yahoo.com
Bring your own food to share; soft drinks will be provided

Next Newsletter

The next newsletter, the Autumn issue, will appear in September. Copy deadline for this will be 31st August. If you would like to contribute anything then please contact me at:-

tarsigercyanurus1@btinternet.com or **01903 207993**
Russ Tofts
Newsletter Editor

Online-recipient Content Only

Bhutan - Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon

Sounds remote- in the Himalayas somewhere – but what marks out Bhutan as somewhere special in a shrinking world with so many exotic locations? Read on and find out -----

High in the Himalayas, tucked out of sight and consciousness between Tibet (occupied by China since 1959) and the north-eastern Indian states of Sikkim, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh, lies the small Kingdom of Bhutan. It is one of the planet's last precious gems that, until very recently has been untouched by western civilisation and values. In this land that time forgot, a Buddhist culture is integrated into every aspect of daily life. Spectacular snow-capped mountains are the backdrop to primary forests and endless valleys dropping down from the high Himalayas. The landscape is dotted with whispering prayer flags, prayer wheels and sacred Chortens, occasional settlements with distinctive architecture, monasteries clinging improbably to sheer mountain sides, and dominating fortresses- Dzongs- which house both monastic communities and provincial administrators.

This is the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon. It is about the size of Switzerland, but with only just over a half a million people. It has the high Himalayas in the north, with peaks up to 7400m. Across the middle, it has a series of foothills and white water river valleys running southwards, with passes above the tree-line giving access to a series of new valleys, each with a different character. The southern strip of Bhutan is sub-tropical and drops down to the Indian plain and mighty Brahmaputra river. Bhutan has a single carriageway main road that runs from its south west border with India, through Paro with Bhutan's only airport, and on through Thimpu, its Capital [pop. 100,000]. The road continues through the ancient heartland of middle Bhutan before dropping southwards again to its other road exit to India in the south-east.

What singles Bhutan out as "Shangri-La"? Its people, culture, serenity, and ----- its absence of people. We were held up for nearly 6 hours by a landslide near a high pass. A boulder the size of a bus lay across the narrow main east west road until it was dynamited away. During that time the blockage had trapped 17 vehicles!

So, endlessly spectacular scenery, friendly open Buddhist people, and a transcending sense of awe, wonder, and, yes, privilege.

But what of the birding? Well, yes. The 6 in our group saw the tip of a huge raft of resident and migrant birds. Bear in mind that our original trip aims were to understand more of Bhutanese history, culture and lives, as well as its birdlife. We had unforgettable views of the astonishing Himalayan Monal. We saw it in the early morning just below a 4000 metre Pass.



We saw the globally endangered White Bellied Heron too.



This was in a river valley near to the most imposing Punaka Dzong which is located at the confluence of 2 rivers.



There was a Crested Serpent Eagle in the early morning, waiting for the day to warm up before taking wing.



As we dropped down into the warmer forest we were inspected at close range by Himalayan Griffon Vultures.



A feature of our birding walks down miles of empty single carriageway main road was the number of mixed feeding flocks that flitted through. There would be nothing on view, and then it would be birding mayhem. We encountered a Stripe throated Yuhina singing.

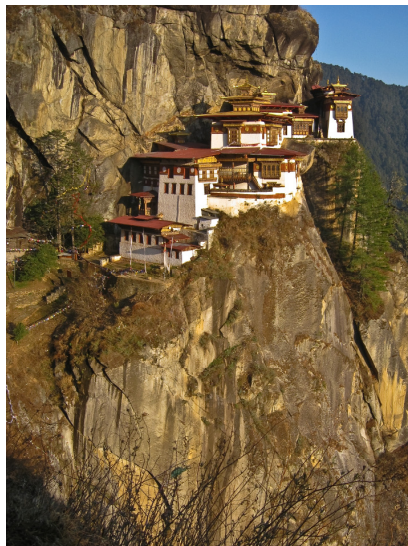


Highlights of the trip?

Mount Everest on the flight in from Kathmandu to Paro.



After an excruciating hike, being blessed at the spectacular, Improbable Tigers Nest Monastery.



Sunrise at the frosted Chela La (Pass)



Chance encounters with Incarnate Lamas, Provincial Governors, itinerant carpenters and Yak herders.!



Indeed a very, very special Kingdom. We will be returning. It is that special!!

Michael and Wendy Ball

Some Recent Bird Images

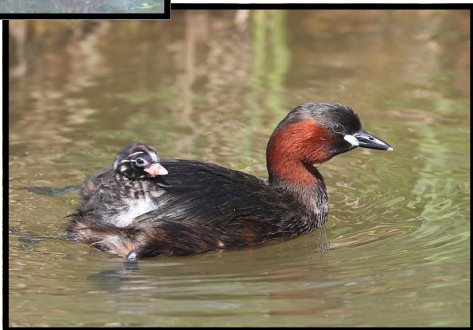
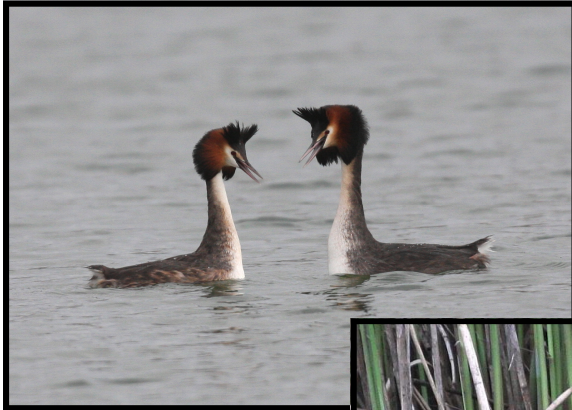


Photo Credits and Details

Great-crested Grebes displaying at Chichester Gravel Pits (Ivy Lake) by Russ Tofts.

Mandarin Drake at Ferring by Patricia Hall.

Little Crake at Arundel WWT by Russ Tofts.

(This very popular bird attracted many admirers; thanks to the WWT staff for extended opening hours and their help in ensuring that this was a success for everybody).

Little Grebe with young at Arundel WWT by Russ Tofts.

Yellowhammer at Cissbury by Russ Tofts.

Hobby at Pulborough RSPB by Russ Tofts.

All photos in the **Bhutan** article courtesy Wendy Ball.