



S HOREHAM
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SPRING 2013 NEWSLETTER

Spring and Summer Outings 2013

(# = WC and BT = Bring Torch)

Mar. 23rd (Sat) am only Warnham L.N.R.

£1.00 entry charge #

Meet 09:30 in reserve car park situated north-west of Horsham just off A24 on the B2237.

O.S. sheet 187 . Ref. TQ167323 - Dist. 3K (1).

Leader: Brianne Reeve - 01273 452497

Apr. 27th (Sat) am only Dawn Chorus, Upper Beeding

Meet 06:00 in Saltings Field. Park opposite The Castle pub and walk east along road, cross River Adur at Bramber Bridge & walk north 200 yards along riverbank to Saltings Field on right.

O.S. sheet 198 . Ref. TQ 195107 - Dist. 3K (1).

Leader: Brianne Reeve - 01273 452497

Apr. 28th (Sun) am only Worthing Seawatch #

Meet 08:00 in the beach shelter opposite Marine Gardens.

O.S. sheet 198. Ref. TQ130020 - Bring chair (1).

Leader: John Newnham - 01903 247596

May 3rd (Fri) eve only SWT Nightingale Walk # BT

Meet 20:00 in Woods Mill, SWT car park

O.S. sheet 198. Ref. TQ218138 - Dist. 2K (1).

Leader: Val Bentley 01273 494723

May 11th (Sat) am only Anchor Bottom

Meet 09:30 in Beeding Hill (Fiveways) car park, approached along the Upper Shoreham Road and then Mill Hill to Beeding Hill.

O.S. sheet 198. Ref. TQ208097 - Dist. 3K (2).

Leader: Chris Wright - 01903 814859

May 21st (Tue) am only Knepp Castle

Meet 09:30 at The Bothy, just to the left after the entrance gates.

O.S. sheet 198. Ref. TQ153221 - Dist. 5K (2) - some rough ground.

Leader: Brianne Reeve - 01273 452497

June 14th (Fri) eve only Wiggonholt Common for Nightjars

Meet 20:45 in the Pulborough RSPB car park. BT.

O.S. sheet 197. Ref. TQ059164 - Dist. 2K (1).

Leader: Russ Tofts & Dorian Mason - 01903 414024

Jul. 7th (Sun) The Burgh

Meet 09:00 at the triangle, Peppering Lane, Burpham.

O.S. sheet 197. Ref. TQ042095 - Dist. 7K (2/3).

Leader: Bernie Forbes - 01903 753876

Indoor Meetings

April 9th Rye Harbour's Birds and Habitats

by Barry Yates

Next Newsletter

The next newsletter, the Summer issue, will appear in August. Copy deadline for this will be 25th July. If you would like to contribute anything then please contact me at:-

tarsigercyanurus1@btinternet.com or 01903 207993

Russ Tofts Newsletter Editor

Chairman's Report to the AGM 2013

I have looked back over the last year to remind you of what the Society has been doing. In February, after consultation with John Knight, the WSCC Countryside Ranger, and at Terry Hicks suggestion, we planted three Whitebeam trees along the Downslink to the west of Old Erringham Farm. The planting was attended by two Presidents, Bernie and Stanley Allen. Bernie and John Knight dug the required holes and several members were there to witness their efforts. Diane and Terry were able to see the trees in place which gave Terry much satisfaction. They were duly watered well in the spring and when I saw them yesterday they were looking in good condition, a fitting tribute to the start of our sixtieth year.

We have made representation following several planning applications, making our views known. In early March we heard that ASDA had lost a request to dump huge quantities of raw sewage into the Ferring Rife. Ed Miller, of the Ferring Conservation Group, was the driving force behind the protest but it was felt that our letter also had some effect and we were thanked for our support.

I have been attending meetings regarding E.ON's proposal for a wind farm off the Worthing coastline. Last year I told you about the proposed route through the Sompting Gap and eventually reaching the sub-station at Bolney. Many of our members were very worried by these proposals, the disruption and the effect on the countryside in this area. In October 2012 E.ON announced it has selected Newhaven Port as the Rampion operations and maintenance base should consent for the project be given. I am still not certain whether this is a reprieve for our area but I do know that many of you have serious concerns about this form of renewable energy and its long-term feasibility.

Several members made a great effort to protest about the Adur Local Plan and the vast number of houses proposed to be built on the floodplains to the west of the River Adur. This is an on-going issue but at least SDOS has put strong views forward and we should be informed as the plans progress.

Only this week Stanley Allen has sent information about the future of Widewater. After years of begging and pleading for the safeguarding of

this saline lagoon he has now heard that WSCC, SWT (via Tony Whitbread) and the RSPB (via Chris Corrigan) are prepared to help with an ecological survey to be carried out this summer. He has posted on the usergroup a passionate article he wrote to the Environment Agency some years ago. If you are not on the usergroup but would like to read it, please give me your e-mail and I shall forward it to you.

The last local issue is also hot-off-the-press. It seems that Dudmans, who work at the Cement Works, have gone into administration. We are not sure how this will affect our two species of breeding birds, the Raven and Peregrine. They are used to noise and everyday activity, which will probably continue for a while, in some ways this is a kind of protection but we shall have to wait and see what happens in the next few weeks.

Now to a few positives! Our outings and Indoor Meetings have been exceptionally well attended by a large proportion of the membership. The impromptu outings have been particularly popular. These have been announced with as much notice as possible at our meetings or on our usergroup. If you are not on the internet you can ask to be contacted by phone, I have a little list! We must thank each of our leaders who go out in all weathers, and this last year *has* been particularly testing, but they keep a cheerful demeanour and manage to show us a vast variety of birds.

The Jubilee account is the one we use to finance our projects for the benefit of the members and the community. Money goes into it from various sources: from the sale of books or equipment, or from generous donations from members and I particularly name David Wood and Tony Bullock in that category. Bernie and Dorian put up a splendid new seat near the riverbank opposite the Cement Works at the beginning of October paid for from this account. The seat is in an excellent position: amongst the sightings so far are Kingfisher, Little Grebe, Green and Great-spotted Woodpeckers and Common Sandpipers. Oh and Osprey! The Osprey which arrived on August 10th and gave so many marvellous views to numerous people must have been the bird of the year for many. It stayed in the area for 79 days. Will it call in on its way back in the spring?

Our latest project is at the hospice, St. Barnabas House at Goring, a bird feeding scheme, to which we have committed for the next five years. We have supplied feeders and food and hope in the future to be allowed to put up some nest boxes, particularly one with a camera so that patients can watch any activity via a television set in their room. This was another

idea suggested by Terry Hicks when he was being treated at St. Barnabas House.

Finally, I thank those members on our Council who do so much just for the benefit of the SDOS giving hours and hours of their time:-

Bernie Forbes, Sue Miles, John Maskell, Shena Maskell, Russ Tofts,

Dorian Mason, Audrey Wende, Helen Bryett and Peter Wyld.

I must mention Brian Clay for the production of the Report which really does get better and better year after year and is a very important window on our Society for the ornithological world.

Clive Hope, who is standing down as Recorder has also done a very demanding job for many years, with a great deal of input from the masterly John Newnham. Collating the Systematic list is never easy. I received a letter from one of our members which I feel is worth quoting: "I'm always amazed at the extent of work and expertise that must go into gathering and collating all that info. There's the figures, the graphs, the writings in all the systematic bird list. Info from the Ringing teams, Garden surveys, Seawatch and the good images all put together to produce a very informative and readable Publication. I congratulate all involved – Editor, second in command and all the Indians in the Team – well done. In a word – Brilliant!" It is always good to get such positive feedback.

Val Bentley is not a member of Council but is in charge of the Garden Bird Survey. She sorts out all our records and writes up a fascinating article for the Report. She is also the SOS Secretary and a very committed ringer at Cissbury. Maureen Leeves has organised our excellent Raffles here for many years and we are very grateful for the monies raised. Then there is the team who are here at the beginning and end of every meeting. Reg Bradbury reliably opens the Hall and the chairs and tables are set out with the help of Dennis Grimwood and Peter Murrell.

And to all those kind people who provide the refreshments at these meetings, well done and thank you. So we are now in our sixtieth year of existence. The Society has seen some difficult times but I hope its founders would feel we are thriving and fulfilling our aims: to promote the study and protection of birds.

Thank you.

Brianne Reeve February 12th 2013

SHOREHAM DISTRICT ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Minutes of Annual General Meeting
Held on Tuesday 12th February 2013

1. Apologies for Absence: Phil Jemmett and Clive Hope
2. Chairman's Report: As attached
3. Treasurer's Report: As attached. The accounts were unanimously accepted. Dennis Grimwood seconded vote of thanks to Helen Bryett and Dave Green. Brianne gave special thanks to John who is standing down as Treasurer. See attached. Bernie Forbes, on behalf of SDOS, presented John with a framed and original drawing by John Reaney of a male ring ouzel.
4. Nominations: There have been no nominations to replace the following members of Council. All are prepared to stand for another year but Russ Tofts would like to stand down as soon as a replacement is found.

President:	Bernie Forbes
Chairman:	Brianne Reeve
Secretary:	Sue Miles
Membership Secretary:	Shena Maskell
Report Editor:	Brian Clay
Field Officer:	Dorian Mason
IT Consultant:	Peter Wyld
Newsletter Editor:	Russ Tofts
Ordinary Members:	Audrey Wende

The Treasurer and Recorder are both standing down with replacements as follows;

Treasurer: Tim Holter proposed by John Maskell seconded by Helen Bryett.

Recorder: Stephen Simpson proposed by Clive Hope seconded by Dorian Mason.

Ordinary Member: Clive Hope proposed by Sue Miles seconded by Brianne Reeve

John Maskell proposed that Dave Green and Richard Coatsworth be

appointed as our account examiners seconded by Audrey Wende.

All were unanimously elected en bloc.

The meeting ended at 8.05pm.

Treasurer's Report for SDOS AGM 2013

This is my 15th AGM Report as the Society's Treasurer and an appropriate time to be stepping down! In recent years, living under the same roof as the Membership Secretary, it has certainly assisted administration matters for myself... and saved the Society a lot of postage!

For the third successive year Helen Bryett and Dave Green (but it's actually Dave's 7th) have completed a most thorough examination of the Society's accounts and have again missed nothing! They have each done this independently, speedily and made several valuable comments. I thank them both wholeheartedly for their time and effort and would like to propose a vote of thanks.

This year I followed-up comments made at last year's AGM and notified the Society's internet user group members that a copy of the 2012 Accounts were available in the folders section from 23rd January. I hope that this has helped members who like to peruse such matters in advance of the AGM. Also responding to members' comments I have provided paper copies of the Accounts for this meeting rather than displaying them on the screen as in the past few years. Hopefully this will assist clarity.

Of note in the receipts for the Ordinary Account was income from subscriptions. Following suggestions from Dave and Helen I have again subdivided the subscription income to show the split for each of the relevant years. Thus in 2011 we received £1,998 of which £1,518 was for that year whilst £480 was early payment for 2012. In 2012 we received £2,261 of which £1,697 was for 2012 and £564 for the current year (2013). This shows that for 2012 subscriptions for the year contributed £2,177 (i.e. £1,697+£480).

Against the current economic situation income from bank interest has again risen and the Society benefitted from £1.86! Refreshments have

continued to provide a modest income whilst raffle receipts have again increased. I would like to propose a vote of thanks for Audrey & Brianne, the team of volunteers and Maureen Leeves for the raffle sales.

On the payments/expenditure side of the Ordinary Account you will see that in 2012 it would appear that we have made huge economies in printing. In fact costs were virtually the same as 2011 but, despite my request to the Gemini company, they did not present the annual report's printing invoice for £726 until January 2013!

St.Peter's Church Hall now has a new secretary and Claire Fair has been most efficient in sending out invoices... so we are now up-to-date having paid for our 2011 and 2012 hiring in October 2012. And we have already paid for the current year!

After two cheap years our speakers fees increased in 2012 but our expenses in this area were still less than in 2009. Fortunately the Society has a wealth of talent within its ranks and short notice presentations can usually be relied upon!

For 2012 in other areas of income and expenditure we had a typical year.

Now turning over to the Society's other account you will see that in 2012 the Jubilee Account again saw increased activity from a variety of donations. Our current project is to erect feeding stations and nesting boxes at the St.Barnabas Hospice in Worthing.

Thanks to the thriving and stable membership numbers, which generates a healthy income, our membership rates have remained the same for the 7th successive year (£12 Ordinary and £18 Family). Despite my newsletter note and e-mail postings, late payments continue to be an annual problem and last year more than 25% of our membership still needed individual postal or e-mail reminders nearly 3 months after the due date (1st January). Members who pay before 1st January or shortly afterwards are much appreciated as they help to keep costs down. Of course the most efficient way of paying one's subs is to set up a Standing Order and 30 Members now use that method. Thank you.

Finally, I would like to propose that Dave Green and Richard Coatsworth be appointed as our account examiners for 2014.

Incidentally the sale of RSPB pin-badges is operated by myself as an individual RSPB volunteer so income from the sale of these does not feature in the Society's accounts. However, you may be interested to know that in less than two years Society sales have contributed £113 to the RSPB.

Originally it was my wife Shena, a maths graduate, whom the Society approached to become Treasurer. She deftly fended-off the approach... and recommended me! Like a mug I was flattered!

My biggest nightmare has been the annual collection of subscriptions and much time has been spent in issuing reminders. In all that time I've only made one mistake/false accusation and that was to a certain Penny Goddard. I received a very strict response to my reminder. I'd failed to connect her to her fiance Dave Green. Now it's timely to say that you reap what you sow I responded to Penny apologetically... and this summer Shena and I hope to be setting off to Namibia for our fifth holiday with Penny and Dave Green! So I'm looking forward to what Roger has to tell us later on this evening.

Although he was a senior member of NatWest bank Tony Fenton used to be somewhat elusive when it came to paying his subs. However, in 2004 our paths crossed in unusual circumstances when Shena and I were returning from Hungary and Slovakia and we met Tony at Budapest airport. He was arriving as we were departing... but not before I had Tony's cash subs in my pocket!

Finally, the Treasury role has not always run smoothly. As many of you know the ringing group, ably led by John Newnham, used to operate at "The Sanctuary" at Shoreham Pumping Station. The owners, Southern Water, charged the Society a nominal rent of £4 per year. However, in 2007 the site was sold and the ringers were asked to quit. Nevertheless, in October of that year I received a final reminder and solicitors letter re. the non-payment of our £4! It was addressed to "Shoram" DOS.

Thank you all for your warmth and support over the past 15 years. I've thoroughly enjoyed my role and hope that you will support my successor in a similar way.

John Maskell, Hon Treasurer

John Maskell

I should like to give special thanks to John Maskell.

He joined the SDOS Council in 1997 taking over from Tony Bullock as Treasurer. He did warn us at that time that there might be a few problems in 1999 when he intended taking a sabbatical from teaching to travel. I found that at a Council Meeting in 1999 Stanley Allen, our President, thanked Pauline Ford for presenting the accounts on behalf of the Treasurer 'who was on extended travels on a world walkabout'!

However although he still travels a great deal he has always been a meticulous Treasurer for SDOS and has usually been here to present the accounts at the AGM and answer any awkward questions. Fifteen years is a long time to give to any society and we thank him sincerely for keeping the books so carefully.

He will now have even more time to travel on trains to concerts.... trains and concerts being two of his favourite hobbies! We wish him well! We have chosen a gift which we hope will remind him of good times with the SDOS—this is a framed and mounted original drawing by John Reaney of a male Ring Ouzel, presented to John by Bernie on behalf of the SDOS.

Brianne Reeve
February 2013

Outings Reports

Cissbury Ring Sat 13th Oct

Cissbury this morning did the SDOS outing well with at least three, probably five, Ring Ouzels in the usual favoured area around the yew tree by the Flint mines on the western flank of the Ring. One sat in the open for a good five minutes allowing all the party excellent views. Also in that area were two Mistle Thrushes, several Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, a flock of Goldfinches and Greenfinches, a couple of Blackcaps

and a Chiffchaff with Chaffinches and Linnets nearby. Jays were a continual sight as they passed across with up to three together. Overhead near the top of the Ring were two Skylarks, two Kestrels and a Buzzard and on the ground several Meadow Pipits and a Stonechat was seen briefly by some on the path to the top. Red Admirals and a Small Copper added to the bird tally.

Earlier the twelve members were fascinated by ringing activity on the scarp site where two Goldcrests, two Blackcaps, a Chiffchaff, a Robin, a Blackbird and a Song Thrush were seen in the hand. Thanks to Val Bentley and Ralph Harfree for showing us these birds. Swallows and House Martins were passing, the former very low over the group's heads. After a very brief damp start the weather became quite marvellous with wonderful views and glorious sunshine.

Thanks to Peter Casebow and Noranne Biddulph for having their 'scopes to share.

Clive Hope

Shoreham Fort—December 28th 2012

Eleven members of the SDOS gathered at Shoreham Fort for our annual post Christmas amble. For the first 30 minutes steady drizzle combined with a stiff west wind made conditions very unpleasant to say the least. As the morning progressed the rain ceased and the wind decreased somewhat making the environment a good deal better. Around the fort and beach single Rock and Meadow Pipit were found plus a small flock of Linnets that looked bedraggled in the rain. On the western and inner arms of the harbour several Purple Sandpipers were found feeding or roosting. With a party of five on the lower ledge affording close views, eventually we managed to count twelve birds in all. Offshore two flocks of Wigeon totalled forty-five birds and a lone Brent Goose flew west. At the Napoleonic Fort one of the volunteers restoring parts of the fortification allowed the group access to one of the main tunnels giving us a short history of the fort and its construction. Re-locating to Widewater Lagoon ten Red-breasted Mergansers were actively feeding in the

shallow water with several Little Grebes and single Little Egret. The loose flock of Common Scoter were still offshore, although the rough conditions made it impossible to count them. On the beach a small number of Sanderling were busy feeding and offshore a first-winter Kittiwake flew close showing its zigzag upper wing pattern. Wigeon were noted moving west with around forty birds in two flocks as well as two Pintails and a Red-throated Diver.

Bernie Forbes

Henfield—January 6th 2012

Eight of us met this morning at the Downslink Car Park, wondering if we'd get into double figures of species, as the surrounding area had been really quiet since New Year. And so it was! It was pretty misty, and disappointingly no Bullfinches were found along the old railway line, just a few of the standard species, though it was nice to see a couple of Goldcrests flitting about, near Little Betley. We crossed Betley Bridge and headed up to the fishing lake and flooded area beyond. En route feeding in one field which had been sprayed (with slurry?) were about a thousand Starlings, possibly thirty Fieldfares and fifteen Redwings, though could have been more. Forty Meadow Pipits and 4 Pied Wagtails flew across the field too. In the flooded area and lake were maybe three hundred Teal, six hundred Wigeon and three hundred Lapwing, difficult to give a proper count as some were hidden by vegetation. No more interesting duck were found though. There were also four Grey Herons in the same area, and another was seen perched at the top of a tree It then flew off with another, both calling in that prehistoric voice! Sallie, Brianne & Chris had opted out at this stage, and the rest of the group walked down the river bank to the fisherman's track.

Across the other side of the river the only swans were Mutes, but coming back towards Stonepit Lane a little flurry of finches and thrushes all feeding on the track were encountered - Blackbirds, Fieldfares, Redwings, Chaffinches and Greenfinches all being very busy, with more Redwings and Fieldfares in the fields - approximately thirty and seventy of

So only thirty-one species for the morning, but a nice walk, and Tim has now discovered a new area to explore as he hadn't been north of Betley Bridge before!

Val Bentley and Nigel Parsons.

Fishbourne Creek—January 27th

Most people were put off this walk by the weather with only four members, including the leaders, meeting for this walk in very windy conditions. The access road to Apuldram Church was severely flooded with around thirty centimetres of water ; therefore Dell Quay was used for parking. Walking north along the edge of the harbour in wellingtons (essential) the track was very wet and muddy. There was plenty of blue sky although the very stiff westerly wind made birding difficult especially using the scope! The high tide pushed the waders close and gave cracking views of a wintering Whimbrel in the scope before a jogger spooked it and it flew across to the east side of the creek and was lost to view! Fair numbers of Wigeon were feeding with the commoner waders plus a nice flock of Pintail and three Gadwall. From the side of the harbour a small wader was flushed which looked like a wintering Little Stint! Several Rock Pipits were found in the salt marsh plus a Grey Wagtail along the edge of the tide line. Past the sewage plant there were a few Redwings and Fieldfares in the hedgerows and a female Bullfinch showed briefly. Scanning the roosting waders on the spit at the northern end of the creek brief views of the Little Stint as well as Grey Plover and couple of Snipe were obtained. On the walk back a large flock of Brent Geese flew in settling on the water close by - the Black Brant was quickly found and 'scoped. Back at Dell Quay a roosting Greenshank amongst the Redshanks on the opposite bank was located. The group returned to the car park around midday and decided to head home, the west wind being pretty relentless. Although a low turnout, plenty of good birds seen and an enjoyable walk.

Bernie Forbes & Dave Smith

Beeding Brooks - February 24th 2013

Nine members gathered on a cold afternoon when the icy wind was particularly chilling. A small flock of yellowhammers were noted at the start

of the walk which descended into the hedgerow near the stables opposite the meeting point. Whilst admiring the males in their resplendent yellow plumage, a few other birds such as Long-tailed Tit, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Robin, Blackbird and a party of Goldfinches were seen.

Continuing up to the Brooks some common birds such as Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, Greenfinch, gulls and corvids were seen. In the distance a large flock of Lapwings was seen with Starlings, Fieldfares and Redwings amongst them. Something panicked the mixed flock and the Fieldfares flew off overhead into the distance; unfortunately whatever caused the panic could not be located. On route to find the Bittern two Short-eared Owls appeared which then flew into cover. Alas, there was no sign of the Bittern and the Hen Harrier did not show up either. Other wildfowl, Mallard, Mute Swan, Greylag Geese and Cormorant were seen but surprisingly no Snipe. Being too cold for standing around, the group decided to continue round and on the way back saw a couple of Little Egrets with another jet propelled Heron flying with the wind!

A distant Barn Owl by Bramber Castle was watched as it hunted over a reed bed. Sadly, as we got closer the owl disappeared. Back towards the meeting point the group watched some feeding Greylag Geese when a Short-eared Owl put in a final appearance. An enjoyable if perishingly cold walk.

Terry Goble

(The following article (given to me very recently) was written a long while ago by a child living just outside our recording area but who became a member of SDOS many years later. It has been typed up exactly as written. A little quiz! How old do you think the child was at the time of writing and where, roughly, might that child have been living? Answers to Brianna by letter or email please. I should be delighted to find such an observant child as a member nowadays!)

In and around the garden.

I am now living in a new house and I have had to start the garden from scratch. It is partly scrub land with bushes along one side and trees dotted about. This affords excellent shelter for birds.

At the time of writing it is winter, and as I have only been living here about 10 weeks, the only feathered friends to be seen at present are residents and a few winter birds of passage.

It is a cause of great surprise to me that although the winter so far has not been at all severe the birds here are very friendly and will come quite readily to food placed just outside the living-room door even when one is standing just inside the door and can be seen by them.

When I lived in the town birds like the Green Woodpecker seemed quite rare and the rarest bird I ever saw there was Red-backed Shrike or "butcher-bird". It used to come onto the allotments next to my garden almost everyday and I used to admire its chestnut back and strong beak. It is named "butcher-bird" because of its habit of securing its prey on the thorns of hawthorn hedges, this being known as its larder. Unfortunately I have never seen one again. I also saw a spotted flycatcher but the birds I have seen in the country are very different from those I have seen in the town.

Here is a list of the birds that I have seen in my one year of country life: herons, curlews, snipe, willow and wood warblers, teal, widgeon, pintail, tufted duck, goldcrests, nuthatches, tree creepers, pied wagtails, great spotted and green woodpeckers, bullfinches, and goldfinches, sparrow-hawks, yellow-hammers, lapwings, long-tailed and coal tits, etc.

In the garden this summer we had about half a dozen nests two of them being blackbirds, one a hedge-accentor, one willow and one wood warbler. One of the blackbirds nests was wrecked by a pair of magpies, the other was safely guarded and the young brought up. The dunnocks nest was in a yew tree and contained four eggs. The willow warblers was in a clump of grass with a lining of hair and feathers. Three eggs were laid. The nest of the wood warbler was distinguishable from the willow because it did not contain the lining of hair and feathers but just a simple lining of grass. The nest contained six eggs.

We have some fat hung from a tree in the garden for the tits but on one or two occasions a Great-spotted woodpecker came to it. Almost everyday a Green Woodpecker comes to the next door garden to hunt for ants. We also see nuthatch and tree creepers hunting for insects in the trees.

In the next chapter you will be able to read about the other nests I found

and protected last summer. They are not included in this chapter because this one is about the garden only. The lady that lives next door told me that she had found a nightingale's nest but unfortunately the eggs had hatched and the youngsters flown before she told me about it.

A RECORD YEAR

Thanks to encouragement from a fellow SDOS member, namely Penny Green of the Sussex Bio-diversity Records Office, I have become an enthusiastic recorder of several animal classes. Readers of my postings on the SDOS internet user-group will know that I am a great fan of the B.T.O.'s "BirdTrack" recording scheme. For those who are not familiar with this system perhaps I should outline some of the main features.

The BirdTrack project is essentially a partnership between the BTO, RSPB, Birdwatch Ireland, the Scottish Ornithologists Club and the Welsh Ornithological Society that seeks to record bird distribution and migration throughout Britain and Ireland. At the personal level, BirdTrack enables individuals to store and manage their own bird records in the knowledge that their recorded observations will contribute to local, regional, national and international surveys and ultimately conservation. Indeed the system allows one to opt for records to be automatically forwarded to county recorders so that at the SDOS level you know that the Society's Recorder will receive your records without you having to send in a separate list. The great thing is that you can log records for wherever you go so long as you're prepared to register a site. Indeed I know that last year, reflecting my travels, records will have filtered through to a dozen county recorders in England and Wales.

The BirdTrack scheme started in the autumn of 2007 having evolved from the BTO's Migration Watch that commenced in 2002 to record Spring migrants. It is also possible to input one's records from earlier years. Nick Moran, the BTO's BirdTrack Organiser, tells me that currently the record is held by the Isle of May Bird Observatory who have data input from as far back as 1934. So be prepared to dig out those old note books!

To take part in BirdTrack you need internet access and then register as a recorder. This involves entering your name, address and e-mail address.

When you register, you will need to choose a password. You only need to register once at

<http://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack>

You then need to set up sites that you visit regularly and where you record bird sightings. I've gradually added to mine and now have some 240 sites around the UK. My advice would be to start with your garden. I have a site called "41" (our house number) and being numeric it always conveniently appears at the top of my site lists when I log in.

Sites are based on the OS grid and for accuracy I try to stick to 1km squares... but you can create sites covering larger areas up to a 10km square if you wish. As you add more sites you will find certain frustrations so that, for example, my set-up means that Cissbury Ring is covered by 4 squares!

When first using BirdTrack to record your birds you'll be presented with the entire British List! This can be a bit daunting for sites that don't usually offer-up many birds. So when you get more proficient you can alter your settings so that after a few visits your individual site lists will only show the birds you have seen in the past... and you then have the option of adding additional species as you record them. I've set my basic list number at a mere 10 species as I visit several London urban sites where one doesn't usually encounter many species... but 10 is a very low number! The BirdTrack statisticians prefer complete bird lists but you can just add "casual sightings" if that's all you've time for.

If you choose to, the system has the facility for you to add your own "General" comments and "Weather" etc to your BirdTrack lists. It's also possible to record dragonfly sightings at each of your sites. I now have data going back 10 years stored on BirdTrack and my usage has increased each year. In 2011 I made a concerted effort to "up my game" and I contributed some 711 lists and whilst researching this article I discovered that this placed me 4th nationally in terms of contributors!

Last year, adopting Simon Barnes' mantra "I am birdwatching", I set myself the Olympic challenge of attempting to record "most" of the birds I saw in 2012 either on foot or from my bike, i.e. every bird seen every day... apart from those seen when travelling by car or train (though I even

logged some of those!). At midnight on New Year's Eve my annual total was more than 1,000 lists. Obviously not all of those records are from the SDOS or wider Sussex area.

It is perhaps pertinent to point out that a BirdTrack "record" is a species logged not the number of birds. So one record could be a single Robin or a flock of 300 geese. When entering the date for each list you have the option of giving exact numbers of birds, approximate numbers (e.g. 30+) or just "seen". When entering each species you need to tick a box to indicate that you saw/heard that species. Most days I just record Herring Gulls over the garden as "seen" as I've no idea how many I've looked at. I suspect that it may be just one bird on a wire operated from my neighbour's roof!

Now if all this sounds like a statistical nightmare I also run a moth light trap in my spare time and last year forwarded more than a thousand species records to the County Recorder. But it didn't stop there as there were also records of Butterflies, Dragonflies, Beetles, Insects and Spiders, Amphibians and Mammals. I must confess that most of those were garden records but, including the birds, it provided a grand total of some 10,821 records submitted to the relevant authority. Draw your own conclusions! Interestingly on my study wall hangs a copy of W.H.Davies' poem entitled 'Leisure' that begins,

"What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare"

Incidentally, my wife, Shena, and I agreed that the only record that we wouldn't submit for 2012 was a Ruddy Duck. No comment!

Contrary to any image you may have formed I am certainly not a computer expert and my skills are pretty limited. However, I have found BirdTrack very straightforward and, if you're prepared to give it a go, you will find a system that is very user-friendly.

In summary, beware... recording, in general, and 'BirdTrack', in particular, can become addictive. At whatever level you undertake your birding, BirdTrack is the only list you will need to keep. Try it and see! Log in and have a look. The great thing is that you know that your records are safe and are always available for reference. **John Maskell**

Local Birding

The winter birding has generally been slow with the cold spell producing little in the way of exceptional records. The flock of Common Scoter off Widewater exceeded 100 birds and included single Velvet Scoter and Long-tailed Duck. Three Jack Snipe were there in the cold weather. At the same time a number of Woodlarks were seen at Shoreham Airport, Cuckoo Corner and Goring. Waxwings had a very good winter over most of the UK with up to 28 birds in the vicinity of Durrington First School being the most easily 'twitchable' and enjoyed by school staff and passers-by alike. One or two Black Redstarts wintered around Shoreham Harbour although usually elusive; double-figure counts of Purple Sandpipers were the norm. Snow Buntings were thin on the ground all over so a single bird for four or five days on the beach between Goring and Ferring was very welcome especially as the light was very nice for photography and the bird typically confiding. The flooded fields at Ferring held small numbers of Brent Geese and Mediterranean Gulls plus small numbers of roosting or feeding Dunlin, Ringed Plovers and Grey Plovers.

Further afield Bewick's Swans were in both river valleys; the Adur birds shared their patch with a Red-breasted Goose of unknown origin whilst the Arun birds attracted eleven White-fronted Geese. More recently two Bean Geese set up temporary home amongst the Greylags just outside Arundel WWT where up to 80 Snipe, two Kingfishers, single Bittern and Waxwing, plus the usual Firecrests have been seen. Another Bittern briefly at Pulborough plus, possibly, the same bird on a couple of occasions at Waltham Brooks. After last winter Short-eared Owls have been hard to find although a couple have been seen several times at Beeding Brooks.

No summer migrants yet in our area but already reports of Wheatear, Sand Martin, Swallow, Sandwich Tern, Cuckoo, Osprey, Garganey at other sites in the UK—Spring is just days away!

Russ Tofts

*** Stop Press*** A Wheatear, the first of the year in our area, was at Ferring today, the 9th March.

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