



EXETER AND DISTRICT LOCAL GROUP



The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654

NEWSLETTER No 133

AUTUMN 2008

a million voices for nature

EDITORIAL

There is a wide range of topics in the newsletter this time – international, national and local – because there has been much of great interest.

The item on the apparent decline in Kestrels is something I was discussing with friends only the other day. Are you able to say whether you have seen as many as usual, more, or fewer this year?

The nestboxes have done really well this year, especially for great tits which had large broods and mostly managed to fledge them successfully - but that is not the national picture and many nest recorders have been reporting very bad results. It is surely inconceivable that birds such as blue tits and great tits can be in trouble? But one of my boxes which had a clutch of blue tits was unsuccessful and another was (and still is) occupied by wasps. (That is also really interesting – they have filled the box with their nest and it is now being expanded all over the front. Incidentally – they really do not like the lawnmower!)

If you do not feed during the breeding season I would like to urge you to start again as soon as you can - once the table and the feeders have been thoroughly cleaned, of course. Consider moving the position of feeding to rest the area and reduce the possible build up of pathogens. I have young Great Spotted Woodpeckers coming in regularly now.

Our AGM will be held on 14th October and the papers for this comprise the last four pages of this newsletter - designed so you can remove them from the rest of the newsletter if you wish. There are nomination papers included and, as you will see

that we are looking for a secretary and Campaigns organiser please read what John has to say about the filling of vacancies and give it some serious thought. We are also in need of an organiser or two to take on our two Fayres – again give John a ring if you want to know what is involved. Finally on this subject, if you think you might be interested in joining us on committee and would like to come along first to see what it's all about, what you think of us (and what we think of you) and if it could be fun – do have a chat to any one of us either in person or on the phone.

Let us hope that the weather improves and we all get to enjoy some more sunny, warm and dry days so we can get out and enjoy the birds.

This edition is about a fortnight late for various reasons and I offer many apologies to those who worry about these things.

The deadline for the next issue is **11th October** please.

Stella Beavan
The Hayes, Zeal Monachorum
Crediton
EX17 6DF
Tel 01363 881360

e-mail: stella@treedown.eclipse.co.uk

NOTES AND NEWS

GROUP LEADER'S COMMENTS

Having said in the last newsletter that we would shortly be showing people the Exeter Peregrines they decided not to use the usual ledge this year but nested inside the tower instead thus retaining their privacy!

A few members have still not renewed their subscriptions this year so, if this is an oversight,

please contact our Membership Secretary, Liz Saunders on 01392 832080.

It is right that we let you know where your money goes and in the past few months the Group has made donations towards Wetlands work and the Cirl Bunting project, both highly important works within our area.

Whilst I was unable to attend this year's Spring Fayre it was clearly a success and our thanks go to Pam Hancock for her excellent organisation and all the 'helpers' without who there would be no Fayre. Regrettably Pam has decided that she cannot continue organising the Spring Fayres with her other commitments so we are looking for someone to take over. Ideally it is a job which 2 could perhaps share (see the vacancy notes inside the newsletter).

Having also said in the last newsletter that we at last have a full committee it didn't last long! With the AGM approaching in October the Group will be losing the services of ...myself (for whom a replacement has been found in Roger Tucker who has been a group member for a couple of years, is a stalwart at Bowling Green, at Berry Head and on Avocet Cruises. I am delighted that we have found such an able replacement.)...Carole Lewis the Publicity Officer who will be working with me on raising the RSPB profile in the Torbay area (replacement needed)...and Penny Avant the Campaigns Co-ordinator (again replacement needed). The vacancy notes inside cover these jobs and I strongly urge you to help out if you possibly can. I've said it before but it bears repeating...the Group functions best with a full committee and the membership cannot expect a handful of people to carry out the many and varied functions entailed. Please contact me or one of the committee if you feel you can help.

It will be my last AGM as Group Leader and I look forward to seeing many of you there.

John Allan

SPRING FAYRE 2008



We were fortunate to have a bright, dry morning for the Plant Sale and Spring Fayre and a steady flow of customers seemed to come through the door, encouraged, I hope, by the flyers I handed to people coming out of the Market Hall!

The stalls looked attractive, with some very tempting goods having been donated this year. We had an impromptu Stationery Stall thanks to several boxes of very pretty cards, notelets and writing sets brought along by Rosemary Partridge, which completely sold out. The Cake Stall also sold out as ever. I know we keep saying this, but we really cannot have enough cakes, donations of these are so welcome. The Plant Stall looked good, with healthy strong plants for sale that attracted a lot of interest and sold quickly. We had a table of Bird Food for sale, brought along by staff from Darts Farm and this was appreciated by our customers

who had noticed there was no bird food for sale at the previous two Fayres.

I would like to mention all the stalls and all the helpers, but it would take too long! However, I would like to say a really big 'Thank you' to everyone who worked so hard, setting up the stalls the day before, and running the stalls on the day. And to those who helped with the less obvious tasks of unloading cars, publicity, clearing up and trying to help me with my new computer!

And 'Thank you' of course, to all who donated goods, cakes and plants and who supported the Fayre on the day. We raised £582.81, a worthwhile sum that can be donated to local RSPB projects. Well done all of you.

Pam Hancock

CAN YOU HELP US?

The Group has the following vacancies which need to be filled -

Fayres Organiser(s)

This is an important role as our Fayres are one of our main sources of raising money to support the RSPB actions in the South West. Our Fayres take place in Topsham in May and November selling a wide range of goods. A willing band of volunteers look after the stalls and 'tea counter' but the organiser needs to contact these people in advance (to ensure there are enough helpers on the day and on the evening before to set up the stalls) and to have an 'overseer' role during the Fayre. The booking of the hall and general liaison with the Topsham church also falls in their remit. The money floats and stall takings are dealt with by our Treasurer. It is helpful, though not essential, that the organiser attends committee meetings before and after the Fayres to ask for help if needed and to give a brief feed back afterwards. It might be ideal if two volunteers were able to split the work between them.

Publicity Officer

The Publicity Officer will need to contact local press and radio to publicise indoor/outdoor meetings/Fayres etc. and to produce posters to publicise the same. Use of PC and some PC skills are therefore essential. A list of contact names and addresses is available.

Campaigns Co-ordinator

The RSPB is now one of the leading national and international conservation and environmental campaigners and this is a fairly new post created with the aim of spreading news of current RSPB campaigns. It requires someone to keep track of the

latest campaigns and to decide how best to act upon them to enthuse Group members and public alike.

All the above posts can be committee posts but can also be run outside the committee if the applicant does not wish to attend committee meetings.

Full support and guidance will be given to anyone interested so please contact John Allan on 01626 821344.

THE 100 CLUB

Congratulations to the following winners for the last months.

April

£5: Mr and Mrs BL Callaway
Ms CM Lewis
Mr JK and Mrs VM Swain
Mr K Atkinson
Miss J Allen

May

£5 Mr R A Beer
£5 Mr J and Mrs M Parker
£5 Mrs A Crawford
£5 Miss S Bowers
£5 Miss K Holroyde

June

£5 Mrs L Brown
£5 Mr M Adams
£5 Mrs H Wilkinson
£5 Mr G and Mrs L Houlden
£5 Mr and Mrs W Jones

LOCAL GROUP EVENTS

Coach trip to Portland

On 21st September we are running a coach trip to Portland. The Isle of Portland protrudes some 6 miles into the English Channel from the coast of Dorset. Spring and Autumn are probably the best time to visit, with the chance of a good number of migrants, depending on the weather. A bird observatory at Portland Bill attests to its importance as a migration hot-spot.

We will be leaving Exeter at 8.30am, also stopping to pick up people in Honiton. Our first stop will be at the Chesil Beach visitor centre, which is a good place to watch waders and gulls on The Fleet. We will then travel on to Portland Bill. There will be an optional birdwatching walk of a couple of miles, or you can just stay near the lighthouse to have your

lunch. Finally, we will drive to one of the nearby RSPB reserves, at Lodmoor, where we expect to see ducks, waders and, if we're lucky, Bearded Tits. We expect to be back in Exeter about 7.00pm.

The cost will be £16 per person. Please book your place by sending me your cheque and a stamped addressed envelope before 1st September, so that we can confirm the coach reservation. Please see the "looking forward" section of this newsletter, or the website, for more details.

Trip to Anglesey

If you have booked a place on our birdwatching weekend in Anglesey on 14th-17th November, please remember to send the balance of your payment to Keith Offord by **10th October** - for details see the letter that I sent you in January. I will contact you 1-2 weeks before we go, to make arrangements for those who wish to share cars to travel to Anglesey.

At the time of writing there is a spare place on this trip as one person who booked is now unable to come. Please contact me (phone 01404 813666) as soon as possible if you haven't booked and are interested in joining us; the cost is £270 plus £20 single room supplement. If the spare place is filled, I can put you on a waiting list.

Richard Swinbank

SPONSORSHIP

The Group is seeking sponsorship for Indoor Meetings and the Newsletter. If you are interested or know of any person or company who might help please contact Roger Tucker, telephone number 01392 860518 or e-mail parrog@aol.com. Sponsorship would enable us to more easily meet rising costs, so maintaining standards of both meetings and Newsletter, and increase the surplus which is put back into local RSPB projects.

CAR SHARING ARRANGEMENTS FOR FIELD TRIPS

We meet at the Clyst St Mary car park (grid reference SX972911).

To reach the Clyst St Mary car park from junction 30 of the M5 (Sandy Gate roundabout), take the A379 towards Exmouth and Sidmouth. At the first roundabout (after crossing the River Clyst), turn left into Clyst St Mary, left again and follow the road the signs to the car park. We meet (normally) at 8.30am.

ARE THE SOUTH WEST'S BIRDS IN TROUBLE?



Numbers of South West birds such as starlings, cuckoos and willow warblers have dropped by more than a half according to an annual survey.

The findings come from the 2007 BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), which also shows that numbers of kestrels and sparrowhawks in the region have decreased.



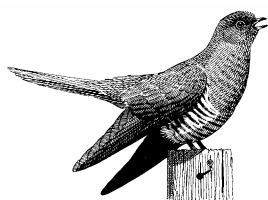
But other species appear to be on the up, with great spotted woodpecker numbers rising by nearly 150% and swallows increasing by 60%. Ravens, Canada geese, pheasant and mallard numbers also appear to be on the rise.

The RSPB's Peter Exley said: 'It's not always immediately obvious why bird numbers have gone up or down, but annual surveys like this one are vital for helping conservation organisations keep an eye on which birds need most attention.'

He added: 'Migrants, such as cuckoos and willow warblers seem to be suffering at the moment and these figures flag up that more research needs to be done to find out why and see what might be done about it.'

As well as the regional drop in numbers, cuckoos are also in trouble nationally. The species seems to be being hit regardless of what habitat it is using. In the South West it is widespread, and can be found at diverse locations all the way from the top of Dartmoor, down to lower, wetter ground close to the Exe Estuary.

Where are all the cuckoos and kestrels?



The British Trust for Ornithology's John Tully, BBS organiser for the Avon Region since 1994 said: 'In 2007, over 75,000 birds were counted but only 17 were cuckoos. Over 30 hours of birdwatching was needed for each cuckoo!'

It has been suggested that a decline in its host species (cuckoos lay their eggs in other species' nests, ejecting the host's own eggs leaving young to be brought up by surrogate parents) may be to blame; but some such as the dunnock appear to be increasing – illustrating just how hard it can be to define the reasons for bird declines.

The decrease of South West England's kestrel population also reflects a national decline. They used to be the most common bird of prey in the UK, but the population is down by 32% in the region and has decreased by nearly 50% nationally over the last 25 years.

A decline in their rodent prey is thought to be to blame, but it is hoped that wildlife-friendly farming methods, supported by agri-environment schemes, may help redress the losses.

The British Trust for Ornithology is keen to recruit more experienced birdwatchers to help with this important work. If you would like more information on what is involved please contact the local BTO representative, John Woodland on 01647 252494

STAMPS FOR SAVE THE ALBATROSS CAMPAIGN

We have just found out that the Stamps for Save the Albatross campaign has brought in a massive £10,000 in the last financial year – our best ever year! Thank you to everyone that helped to raise this money by bringing your used stamps along to the indoor meetings or sending them to us - keep up the good work!

All the money raised goes to the Save The Albatross Appeal. It also leads to loads of great future involvement with us - we get great feedback from stamp collectors who have subsequently become members, get involved in Big Garden Bird Watch and other fundraising and volunteering activities.

For further information on the Save The Albatross Campaign...

The page on albatross stamp collecting on the RSPB website:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/campaigns/albatross/support.asp>

Official Save The Albatross Campaign Website:
www.savethealbatross.net

YEAR END MEMBERSHIP FIGURES

The total number of RSPB members at the end of financial year 2007/08 was 1,057,110 - up by 12,000 members on last year. This is the highest ever figure recorded.

This tremendous result is made up of the following:

882,652 adult members (**up** from 877,221 last year)
174,415 youth members (**up** from 167,947 last year)
43 corporate members (**up** from 23 last year)

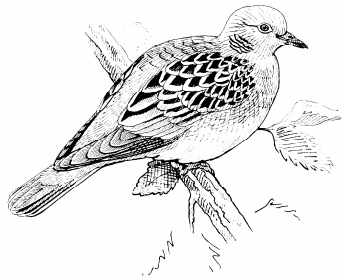
Overall we have had a brilliant year for membership recruitment and retention with many records broken. Nationally there is a target of achieving a membership of 1.2m.

Our members provide the political, practical and moral support for our conservation mission and last year our supporters donated over £60m to support our growing and essential conservation programme. So please continue to take every opportunity you can to recruit new members and retain RSPB supporters and give nature a louder voice. If you do know anyone who might like to join any committee members will be able to help. Or why not give RSPB membership as a gift?

Thank you.

SPRING HUNTING IN MALTA AND CYPRUS

Great news! On 24 April the European Court of Justice banned the Maltese government from permitting spring hunting of birds during 2008, pending a judgement of the Court next year. This interim measure ordering Malta not to open the spring hunting season for turtle dove and quail this year is a victory in the battle against illegal bird killing in the Mediterranean. It is a major



achievement of several years' work by the RSPB, BirdLife International and BirdLife Malta, including a complaint to the Commission, to get Malta to comply with the EU Birds Directive.

Of course this ruling will not deter the committed irresponsible hunters and BirdLife Malta will continue to lead the work to end illegal spring hunting, including through effective law enforcement.

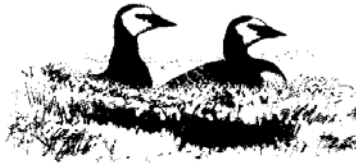
Unfortunately, the good news regarding Malta was not enough to deter Cyprus from opening spring hunting under the guise of crow and magpie control for six days in May. This follows a written warning from the European Commission to Cyprus last spring after they permitted two days of spring turtle dove shooting. Cyprus responded by promising not to do it again, but this May 'crow control' delivers on a pre-election promise of the new President of Cyprus to permit spring shooting. Evidence from our two-person surveillance team shows that much shooting is going on in areas with no crows and that the hunters are primarily targeting turtle doves.

BirdLife Cyprus and BirdLife International submitted a complaint to the Commission the day the Government announced the spring shooting and they are proceeding with infringement action.

LEWIS WIND FARM REJECTED

As some members may have heard, the Scottish Government has rejected the proposal by Lewis Windpower to construct 181 giant turbines on SPA-protected peatland and moors on the Isle of Lewis. This enormous development would have been by some way the largest wind farm ever constructed in Europe. The chosen location is incredibly important for birds - for once the designated area was in the right place and of the right scale. Tens of pairs of both divers, both eagles, merlins, etc would have been adversely affected, and hundreds of pairs of golden plover, dunlin (30% of the EU population of the distinctive *schinzii* race) and other waders

displaced. Deep peatland would have been criss-crossed by 150km of roads and pylons, and numerous quarries would have been constructed. Add to that the migrating whooper swans from



Iceland, plus barnacle and pink-footed geese (and corncrakes) which would have had to fly through the turbine array and you begin to see why we were so concerned.

Fighting this case has been very testing and hard going. We were up against a very well resourced opponent who had close connections with leading political figures north and south of the border, and a Council wholly committed to the development. Fortunately, there were many local objectors - and as at Cliffe we worked closely with them. Our staff on the islands - particularly Martin Scott - were under constant pressure, living and working as they do in the community, which has been deeply divided by this proposal.

Our team in Inverness provided help and support, including attending numerous difficult debates with Councillors and staff. In Edinburgh, Anne McCall managed our team of planners and policy advocates, and we were supported by legal and technical advice from colleagues in the Conservation Division. Equally important was the support from Public Affairs who ensured our views were on the website and our letter writers were well briefed. Lastly, we are grateful to the help from our BirdLife office in Brussels who carried the torch for us and hosted meetings we had with DG Environment. In short, this was a collective team effort, which spanned some six years, and one which showed the RSPB working at its best. Huge thanks are due to everyone who contributed in any way to this campaign, but a particular word of thanks to Martin and Anne.

Well done to everyone and thank you!

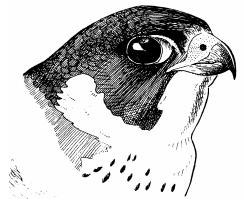
STOP KILLING BIRDS OF PREY! ADD MY VOICE!

An important stage in our work to protect our birds of prey has been reached. We have launched a challenge to moorland owners and managers in northern England to work with us to meet a target of 40 pairs of hen harriers by 2010 - modest enough, but a significant step up from the 14 nests in 2007!

Overall the fortunes for birds of prey are improving - a lot of this is down to the hard work of RSPB staff and volunteers over decades - working with many partners and supporters. Ospreys, white-tailed eagles, marsh harriers and peregrines have all benefited directly from our help. Seeing red kites soaring over the M40, or around the Angel of the North highlights the difference we and our partners have made in making a real difference for these charismatic birds.

But - birds of prey have enemies - the complete disappearance of 4 species from Britain and the massive reductions in populations of others have not happened by accident. They have been shot, trapped and poisoned for hundreds of years - this visceral intolerance still persists in several parts of

upland Britain. In the Peak District National Park goshawks and peregrines have been eradicated. In the early years of the 21st century this is wrong. Not only have these special birds been snuffed out, but visitors to our oldest National Park are denied the chance of seeing birds



that will live long as memories of time spent in the hills.

So, good progress has been made, but some profound challenges remain. Our campaign aims to harness popular support - don't forget over 400,000 people visit our bird of prey Aren't Birds Brilliant projects each year. Even if the birds do then nest inside the Tower instead of on a nicely visible ledge (see Group Leader's report). We have been trying out a pledge for individuals to signal their support for our campaign - we already have over 21,000 pledges (making 86 members already). This is where you can all help - please visit the campaign pages on the web site:

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/campaigns/birdsofprey/index.asp> - and sign up. And please think about whether you can promote this to your friends and family.

We will judge our success by the progress we can make in those areas of the UK where birds of prey are routinely persecuted and we will be rolling out a programme of action across the UK to tackle the problem on the ground.

HEN HARRIER IS OFFICIALLY ENGLAND'S MOST THREATENED BIRD OF PREY



Hen harriers have been included on the government's list of species considered of principal importance for conserving England's wildlife. In making the announcement, the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs said the move was recognition of the Hen Harrier being 'England's most seriously threatened bird of prey.'

While there are more than 700 breeding pairs of hen harriers in the UK, the English population is held down by illegal killing, disturbance and habitat loss.

Last year there were just 14 successful nests in England and early indications are that numbers this year will be no better. Many nests require 24-hour

protection for them to succeed, but parent birds remain vulnerable when feeding nearby.

Sue Armstrong-Brown, the RSPB's head of species conservation, said: 'This official recognition of the hen harrier's plight in England is very welcome. The RSPB has been campaigning for many years to put an end to the illegal killing of this beautiful bird.'

The Secretary of State is required to produce the list under the terms of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

The Act places a duty on all public authorities to consider the conservation of England's wildlife. The list acts as a guide to which species and habitats are of most importance for conservation action. Government is required to identify and promote conservation measures that need to be taken.

All the other species on the list are identified as priorities for conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The hen harrier is not, because of relatively healthy populations in other parts of the UK.

In Defra's words, the bird has been included on the NERC list 'in light of the severe declines this bird has suffered in England.'

Dr Armstrong-Brown said: 'England's uplands could support more than 200 pairs of hen harriers if the killing were to stop, but to see their numbers and range increase, hen harriers must first be allowed to breed successfully on moorland managed for grouse shooting.

'By 2010 we would like to see 40 successful pairs breeding in England - half of them on grouse moors. We have asked landowners and land managers to work with us to reach this modest but important target.

'Government must now agree measures that will give hen harriers the best chance of gracing our skies once more.'

RESERVE REPORTS

RSPB AYLESBEARE COMMON NATURE RESERVE

By the time you read this Heathweek will have happened. The last week in July will be started by the Heathweek Festival at Woodbury Castle which includes many crafts and activities, as well as wildlife walks and pond dipping sessions. During the week there will be a daily selection of events and open days at venues across the heathlands, including night time bike rides and walks, all aimed at showing people the interest and pleasure to be had from the heaths. The final day is a full on day for us: beginning with a dawn walk and barbeque breakfast and finishing with a bats, moths and nightjar walk. In between are a range of pond dipping groups, dragonfly and butterfly guided walks and willow crafts. If you missed Heathweek this year, remember to look out for the publicity for next

year or call the Regional Office in Exeter and get on the mailing list.

But before all that disturbance strikes, our normal summer work continues. The usual summer jobs include controlling the growth of bracken on the heath by mowing and rolling the new growth and treating with a bracken-specific chemical. The wood cut during the winter is also being steadily moved off the heath.

The cows are currently all being vaccinated for Blue Tongue. There are three groups out on the heaths at present: on Harpford there are ten cows and ten calves, the same numbers on Venn Ottery Common, and 14 cows with calves on Aylesbeare Common. They are all Galloways, so we have rare breeds of cow as well as rare breeds of bird. So our stockman is certainly earning his keep at present, making sure they are all well and in the right place, stopping the vegetation growing up round the electric fences. If you visit, the cows are quite tame and may approach you (hoping you will feed them!). This should be nothing to worry about, but make sure you keep any dogs firmly on a short lead.

We are in the midst of breeding bird surveying at present and the numbers of Dartford warblers appear to back to normal levels, after the dip in 2006. Nightjars are maintaining their numbers and two pairs of snipe have been recorded. Stonechats dipped in 2006 and didn't recover last year, so we are a bit concerned and yellowhammer numbers also seem to be on a bit of a downward curve.



All the expected dragonflies and damselflies have been emerging on time. Keeled skimmers are now on the wing and Southern damselflies were first seen on 23 June.

Green hairstreak butterflies have also been on the wing since 8 June when the first was spotted.

Toby Taylor

EXE ESTUARY RESERVES

Autumn officially arrived at the Exe on 3 July, with the first osprey spotted flying south for the winter! Another osprey stopped off for a spot of summer fishing. However, there is still an awful lot of spring and summer to enjoy first.

Back in May the passage migrants were still heading north: 100 pale-bellied Brent geese seen passing through in the first week. Amongst the usual suspects, a few rarities were spotted: a fulmar over the estuary, an American golden plover, a Temminck's stint and two wood sandpipers. In

June the oddities included a great northern diver and a Slavonian grebe in the estuary, sightings on the reserve included a black kite, a roseate tern and a spoonbill that stayed for two days. A single ruff was spotted in early July. And lurking amongst the resident gull flock have been a Bonaparte's gull, a little gull, a few Mediterranean gulls and small groups of sandwich terns.

One of the most spectacular birds seen in recent weeks has been hobby with up to 11 seen hawking over the marsh in May, reducing to a few individuals in June and July.

Gareth's expert sleuthing revealed 16 pairs of lapwing nesting with at least 22 flying youngsters by the end of June. Sadly, only 4-5 pairs of redshank managed to nest. The floods at the start of June hit them hard and no chicks had been seen by the end of June.

Rain has been a big factor in the management of the reserve during the early summer, causing unexpected and quick cattle moving and delaying weed control works. The rain has also caused plenty of vegetation growth so the volunteers have been busy destroying the invasive hemlock water dropwort and cutting paths as well as making sure the fences are secure for the cattle.

The weather doesn't seem to have deterred the visitors and John Allen and the other local group volunteers have been running their regular programme of showing people birds in Bowling Green hide. In conjunction with Darts Farm shop, a series of events have been planned for the summer. There was a good turn out for the first guided walk to look at the lapwings on the reserve in June, but our guided walk and estuary viewing from the Turf in June was badly affected by the atrocious weather. We hope for more seasonal conditions for the next event. Thanks again to the stalwart volunteers, who braved the weather to show off the reserve.

Up in North Devon the team of volunteer wardens has been patrolling and bird counting at Isley Marsh. Though the Marsh floods at high tide, so no breeding can happen in the reserve itself, a pair of little ringed plovers and two pairs of oystercatchers have been spotted nesting on the ashbeds next door.



At Chapel Wood, ravens and tawny owls have been nesting, with the owls active during the day, giving some lovely views. Spotted flycatchers have also been reported. The volunteer warden has managed to persuade his employers (Western Power) to hold a

work party at the Wood, involving 40 apprentices for a whole week(!), in the autumn, which should sort

out a huge amount of the large-scale work that has been building up. This will include the replacement of the steps, so the paths should be fully open after that event. Huge thanks due to Nigel Worth for organising this!

Malcolm Davies
AJ Bellamy

CORNWALL RESERVES (Hayle and Marazion)

Bird news

Hayle Estuary: With a mild winter followed by a cold spring you could say the weather has been the wrong way round the last three months! We've had very few wildfowl and waders on the estuary but the occasional Glaucous, Iceland, Yellow-legged and Med Gull have kept us looking. Ring-billed Gulls were once regular here but, as elsewhere in the country, they have become scarce and this year we've only had single birds 3rd & 9th February. A Dipper at Lelant Water on a couple of occasions in January was more unexpected. The wintering Avocet was last seen 21st February.

Marazion Marsh: At Marazion there have been occasional reports of Bittern but apparently no regular wintering birds this year. Four Siberian Chiffchaffs and a Marsh Harrier on 28th February started the spring migration but our first hirundines were later than usual with Sand Martin on 14th and Swallow 17th March. A Wheatear on 16th March was our only sighting to month's end in the cold northerly airstream which has seemingly put everything on hold of late.

Reserve News

Marazion Marsh

Guided walks started on Wednesday 9 April and will run every second Wednesday of the month from now until September.

There are many sand martins around and the first reed warbler was heard on the marsh this week so come along to the next walk to see what else turns up.



Hayle Estuary

Oil Spill - On Thursday morning 21 February Jenny Parker, RSPB Assistant Warden received a report of an oil spill at Hayle. When she visited the estuary to investigate the extent of the oil spill, she found no trace on the nature reserve or the wider SSSI protected area. On further investigation, she found oil had reached the upper reaches of Penpol Creek in the harbour. Dave Flumm, RSPB Site Manager,

immediately reported this to the Environment Agency and the Harbourmaster. Jenny said, "It was the quick actions of the Harbourmaster that averted this localised incident affecting the nationally protected Hayle Estuary area. At this time of year there are still hundreds of migrant ducks and waders using the estuary and an oil slick just weeks before they leave for their breeding ground could have been devastating". Hayle Harbour Management Ltd. hired a company to contain the spillage and soak up the oil.

Hayle Estuary Disturbance Action Group Update

Since the groups meeting on 18th Jan a lot has happened. It was felt that not enough information about the RSPB Nature Reserve or the wider Hayle Estuary and Carrack Gladden SSSI was available to the public and that this may be one reason why people continue to disturb the site. During April, the RSPB and Hayle Harbour Management Ltd. will install new signs (50% funded by Natural England) across the estuary to inform people that the area is protected by law and the police will patrol the estuary as part of their usual beat. We hope that these measure will help encourage people to act more reasonably in the future.

HAM WALL

Bitterns

The most fantastic news to come from Ham Wall in recent weeks is of our breeding bitterns. One nest fledged a few weeks ago and it has now been believed that the second has followed suit. The female nesting in phase 2 of the reserve has been showing well to visitors making regular flights, like clockwork, over the railway line into Walton



Heath.

Both BBC and ITV brought crews to Ham Wall for local news reports and were duly rewarded with several flypasts by our female, which were shown that evening on the local news along with a short report on our success.

These are the first bitterns to breed in Somerset for nearly 40 years and we are the first EU Life funded reedbed creation site to have breeding bitterns. Everyone should feel very proud of what has been achieved. None of this would be possible without the help of volunteers and of course our members whom we rely on so heavily. Thank you.

Other wildlife

Elsewhere breeding duck numbers are up on previous years while warbler numbers have dropped slightly. Maybe this is a knock on effect

from last year's wet weather, which also seems to have noticeably affected butterfly numbers on the reserve.

We have had a few exciting visitors since the last newsletter, the most notable being a glossy ibis and good sightings of Osprey, which stayed locally for around two weeks. A female otter with two cubs have been seen on a few occasions and a weasel with young running across the railway line.

Bearded tit numbers are a little down on previous years although juveniles have been seen, including a group of six at one time near to the large wind pump, which has recently been fixed after spending quite some time dormant. Other sightings include: hobby, peregrine, barn owl and stoat.

Management

Recent months have included a lot of monitoring work (including a few hundred hours dedicated to watching and recording bittern flights and behaviour and informing the growing numbers of visitors who came to see them). Volunteers have been monitoring butterfly, dragonfly and damselfly numbers and otters and water voles have been surveyed.

Other key areas of work recently include maintenance of visitor infrastructure and an ongoing fencing project around New Ground.

Once breeding season is over staff and volunteers will be extremely busy with the winter work programme. We aim to equal, at least the 7.6 ha (about 19 acres) of reed cut last year (the Softrak machine will become a second home to staff members) and there are several areas of scrub that need removing. The fencing will be finished off and our new plot of land 'Turners' needs a lot of tidying up.

Steve Couch (Reserve Assistant – RSPB Ham Wall)

WEYMOUTH RESERVES (Radipole and Lodmoor)

Asides from the ditch work and pool creation on Radipole, the emphasis this winter in the absence of reed cutting has been on infrastructure improvements to the reserves. A permanent post and wire fence has been erected the length of the bund across the main moor on Lodmoor. Totalling about 1.5km this represented a considerable effort by reserve staff, who are indebted to our much-missed residential volunteer Anne Simpson and the irreplaceable jack of all trades (master of many), Andy Taylor. Before we could begin this task we had to build new vehicular access onto the saltmarsh to enable us to get the machinery and materials onto the site. Although not without incident, (born of rotten luck regarding the weather) we ultimately prevailed. The path in question has attracted some negative comment but it will henceforth enable far easier management of the site. From an ecological standpoint the realisation of permanent cattle fencing that this access has

facilitated has removed the necessity of us changing electric fence batteries weekly and thus considerably reduced our own disturbance to breeding birds using the site. The aesthetic impact of the path – which is minimal - will obviously soften over time as vegetation re-establishes. Having completed the above, we set about replacing the barbed wire fence at the bottom of the moor that should keep our newly arrived bovines suitably contained!

In the latter part of the winter some considerable effort has been invested in felling, coppicing and pollarding scrub, in particular willow, from the top of Radipole. Our weekly work parties with the mental health charity Rethink has considerably aided this process by dragging brush out of the pasture or reeds to enable it to be chipped into habitat piles for the benefit invertebrates.

ARNE BASED RESERVES,

Further TV fame for Arne with Mark showing off his bell ringing skills on the BBC (TV and radio plus local papers). Swiss cowbells have been fitted to 5 animals put out on heathland summer grazing as an aid to finding them for their regular checks. Very effective they are too! Television fame is not reserved for the staff as the stars of the spring so far have been pairs of; great tits, swallows and kestrels that all successfully raised broods under



the glare of their own nest box cameras. Good quality colour images were beamed back to a screen at the reception hut where a keen eye was kept on all. The kestrels were particularly exciting as the growing chicks fought each other for the privilege of devouring large

slowworms whole. Out of interest a tally was kept of prey items, which revealed that prey was reasonably varied but favourites were between small mammals and birds, however a large number of sand lizards seemed to be brought in which was slightly distressing! We hope to build on the success of the nest cameras for next year when we will show further exciting species in our new shiny reception centre! Guided walks have again been very successfully with two heathland ambles and a nightjar walk every week which have usually been fully booked.

Estates work such as track and fencing repairs have occupied a lot of time to take advantage of the good weather and prepare the reserve for the arrival of curious visitors and grazing animals (or is that the other way round?) With cattle and ponies out on various heaths, it was important to conduct annual maintenance on the fences. Despite this, the

Shetland ponies still managed to limbo under the bottom strand and onto Arne Lane several times. Additional wire was put into the fence line until it was observed that they were simply walking out using the small road drainage ditches! Both hides have been closed for short periods to conduct repairs to their foundations where bearing timbers have deteriorated (as happens to softwood sitting in wet conditions). Replacement of the pole barn in Coombe fields has begun in earnest with demolition only taking a day (with a bit of help from the tractor!). Rebuilding will continue when time allows, as priority spraying work on bracken and rhododendrons must happen when weather permits. A big red almost new Valtra now stands in our yard and is being pressed into service with a new boom sprayer in the fight against bracken.

Poole Harbour gull survey was aided by volunteers from Arne and an interesting time was had using

boats to land and count nests on the main islands used by black headed (8,000+) and med gull (100). Annual survey work continued into full swing with breeding wader surveys, point counts at Arne and Garston and Birds of conservation Concern surveys on selected parts of Arne and Stoborough. Bats at Arne and Garston are being checked as well as the monthly Dormouse checks at Garston.

Bird highlights; Up to 4 ospreys on passage, spoonbills still around! knot, turnstone and grey plover in breeding plumage. Plus little ringed plovers on the peninsular for the first time in 10 years. Visiting Montague's harriers kept staff and local birders happy for the best part of a week in May.

LOOKING BACK

BERRY HEAD AND HACKNEY MARSHES, 5 April 2008

It was cold; the wind blew, but at least the sun was out. There were masses of Magpies and Jackdaws around; Herring Gulls wheeled overhead, two Robins tried to out-sing each other in adjacent bushes and there was a Dunnock on the path. We then went to see what we could see out to sea. The wind was blowing from the north so nothing unusual was being blown in.

We saw Fulmars flying with their rather stiff straight winged action, seemingly with little effort, but not a lot else. On the cliff ledges were rows of Guillemots, about 800 in all. They were sitting motionless on their eggs, which are pear shaped to help prevent them from rolling into the sea, as they are laid directly onto the rock, but several still seem to end up smashed on the rocks below, food for the scavenging gulls. It is sad to note that in the 1910s they were numbered in their thousands not their hundreds. We saw a row of them on the water rather like horses being badly lined up for the start of the Grand National. A Peregrine appeared as if from nowhere; the gulls were not slow in finding it, and promptly mobbed it. We did get a good flying display for about 5 minutes.

Below us we saw two Ravens croaking away to each other and a couple of Sand Martins. In the scrubby area we first heard and then saw a small group of Willow Warblers; Chiffchaffs were heard everywhere we went, but it was nearly an hour before anyone actually saw one; they were playing hide and seek with us. We saw a few Wheatears on the open low



grass. With all those summer migrants there, summer must be approaching.

The stars of the morning were the Cirl Buntings. Those delightful little birds have a black and yellow striped head, a black throat and olive green rump. The males were in full breeding plumage, so were very smart. It is sad to note that in the 1930s they were found as far a-field as Wales and even occasionally in Yorkshire and Essex. Then in the 1980s were found only in small local areas of South Devon like Prawle Point, but it does seem that now their territories are expanding again, as the farmers are using more Cirl Bunting friendly practises. The first one sighted was a black dot on some brambles, then a voice said "over here" and they were within 20 yards of us, so we could really admire their colours. That kept us amused until lunch, which we had at the picnic area, and then they joined us there, so by the end we were rather blasé about them! Just before we left Paul said "Sparrowhawk behind you", and by the time I had turned round, it had gone, such are the delights of birding. I also missed a high flying Buzzard.

After lunch we went to Passage House Inn on the banks of the river Teign; good idea Richard. We started by finding about 6 unringed Egyptian Geese among the Canada Geese. Their forefathers must have escaped and now they are settling into the habitat of the English countryside. They are the first I have seen in England outside Slimbridge. Canada Geese were first brought in for private collections and look at the quantity found now! We saw several Egrets, which are quite at home in England, having got here under their own steam, and a few Shelduck and Mallards. We went round Hackney Marshes which are at the back of Newton Abbot racecourse, where we saw a variety of birds. There were more hidden Chiffchaffs, a Blackcap which was singing its heart out in some ivy, a Garden Warbler nearby,

causing great debates as to which bird-shapes it was, as none wanted to be seen easily. We heard Goldfinches, saw Green and Chaffinches. Two Bullfinches appeared, then disappeared in the woodland. A Kestrel was spied hovering, and Pied Wagtails were flying round the car park; then as it was time to go, I saw a Buzzard soaring overhead, so I managed to see a Buzzard but missed the Sparrowhawk.

Ann Crawford

THE AMERICAN PROJECT

David Boag

Tuesday 8th April

David needed no introduction as we have welcomed him to the group on a number of occasions when he has delighted us with his enthusiasm for wildlife and entertained us with his inimitable presentation and unique sense of humour.

He explained how "The American Project" came about as a result of his initial commission for a major quarrying company to write a book based upon the wildlife of quarries across Great Britain. He told us how he was then asked to turn his attention to some of the more remote areas across five major regions of the United States including Alaska, Florida Everglades, and the Grand Canyon, and to put it all into one book! It was quite a daunting prospect for someone who had never been to America. It was scary and proved to be a very steep learning curve working in a country where buzzards are called "hawks", dragonflies are known as "saddlebacks" and butterflies are "backeyes". A country where there are no rabbits but plenty of "cottontails" or "scrub hares" and where hares are actually called "jack rabbits".

David explained the shock of arriving the day after there had been 28 inches of snowfall to experience temperatures of -18° He noticed immediately how the snow made wildlife more tolerant of people and also how it made the signs of wildlife show up more easily.



David is to be congratulated on the superb quality of his photography and his clever attempts to animate it on occasions. We were impressed by stunning pictures of species such as mountain bluebird, red-winged blackbird, belted kingfisher and American avocet with its red head and the Californian quail with the stupid plume

which seemed to obstruct its view. We all know about David's passion for birds, but he explained how his favourite species of animal tended to be the

wide variety of mammals of America such as the eastern chipmunks, squirrels and the very impressive big horns.

One evening was certainly not long enough for David to show all of his photographs. We thank him for a most entertaining and informative talk.

Chris Steel

DUNSFORD WOODS

Sunday 20th April

Fourteen of us gathered in the car park near Dunsford Woods. Before we set off, we saw Great Spotted Woodpecker and Chaffinch, and heard a Blackcap. It was a misty start, which later turned out good.

We walked down from the car park down to Steps Bridge. We stopped there for a while to look around, with the odd Blackbird, Robin and Blue Tit. Next we took the path along the river bank. At first we didn't see much, but heard plenty of bird song, and a Great Spotted Woodpecker drilling away. After a while we caught sight of our first Pied Flycatcher of the morning, where some nestboxes had been put up. Other birds seen included Jay, Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Blackcap, and Great, Blue and Coal Tits. Chiffchaffs were constantly singing throughout the walk. A Marsh Tit was singing well, and we also head a Tawny Owl around this time. We saw our first Grey Wagtail on the river. We then came to a clearing where Willow Warbler, Chaffinch, Blackcap were seen, and also another Pied Flycatcher.

At this point, we began to make our way back. In the wood, we saw more Pied Flycatchers, a huge wood ant mound, and some interesting-looking black tubes. *[Claire Edey later confirmed with the Wildlife Trust that these tubes are for a study to survey the number of Dormice in the wood- RS.]*

We also saw a pair of Mallard waddling along before the star bird of the day - none other than a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. It was high up in the trees, and found thanks to the knowledgeable people who recognised its call. It was a new bird for me and a few others. Someone then spotted a Dipper to round off the morning, flying fast up the river - thanks to Heidi for calling out that one. We spotted some more Grey Wagtail below the bridge before heading back to the car park after an excellent and very enjoyable morning. Many thanks to Richard and everyone.



Steve Mole

SOUTH MILTON, SOUTH HUISH & THURLESTONE, Saturday 3rd May

Eleven members attended this walk led by Alan Salter [*grateful thanks to Alan for filling in while I was on holiday - RS*]. The brisk South-easterly promised a fall of migrants, and we were told a Hobby flew over us though unfortunately none of us saw it. However we had good views of Whimbrel and perhaps witnessed hirundines and a couple of Swifts migrating in.

We began our walk looking over South Huish water meadows where we could have expected Wheatear or a Yellow Wagtail, but just had the usual - but nonetheless as good - Stonechat, Linnet, Mallard, Coot, Canada Geese and a singing, but unseen, Sedge Warbler. From here we looked out over the sea where two Sandwich Terns were diving for fish and, much further out, a couple of Gannets. On our way to South Milton we heard singing Whitethroats, Dunnock and Sedge again, and in the reeds at South Milton several Reed Warblers. A distant bird perched near the reed tops was identified as a male Reed Bunting with its black head being the giveaway.

We stopped at Warren Head, Thurlestone for lunch and added a small flock of Common Scoter to the list. A Red-throated Diver was seen by one observer. At Thurlestone Marsh a Cetti's Warbler was heard.

In the afternoon Alan decided not to go to Bolt Tail, due to the windy conditions, and took the remaining five members to the woods at the North end of the South Milton reed beds. Here we added Mistle Thrush, Long-tailed Tit and a close-up view of a Common Lizard. Appropriately, to the end the day we heard a calling female Tawny Owl.

Alan Salter

CHALLACOMBE, DARTMOOR Sunday 1st June

We arrived at the King's Oven car park around 9.30a.m. There was a gentle, warm breeze from the southwest. Sunshine with a clear view all round and some haziness in the distance.

The prospects looked good. We set off over the hill towards the West Webburn River; the Meadow Pipits were calling and Skylarks singing from high above. All seemed peaceful. As we looked up from the path a Hobby came from behind at a pace carrying the unfortunate Skylark dangling from its claws. Once over the hill we joined the river and made a short detour up stream. There seemed to be Willow Warblers everywhere. Down the valley, towards Soussons Wood, a Whinchat was spotted

perched on some gorse at a distance. Further along the path we stopped briefly to look at a Green Tiger Beetle and a pool full of water boatman, tadpoles et al. A Whitethroat was heard and a Red-backed Shrike spotted flitting from bush to ground and back again. Great excitement for all, definitely a first for me, and a stunningly coloured male too. Some of us took a left turn into a clearing to have another look at the shrike. We were well rewarded with a close-up of him feeding on insects.



Past the wood up the hill, Blackcaps singing, Siskins flying, we arrived at Challacombe Farm. We were greeted by Swallows and House Martins taking mud from the pond, a Spotted Flycatcher and Redstarts in the field in front of the farm. Across the stream, in the wet meadow high on a birch tree, a Nuthatch was replaced by a Redpoll. Lunch was taken in this place of birds.

Onwards up the hill to Headland Warren Farm following the East Webburn showed more Redstarts darting from the hedge to feed. Further up a Cuckoo called nearby. Near the farm Wheatears showed well, jumping from the walls down to the grass. Beyond the farm, a pair of Whinchats showed well in the gorse. Continuing on over Headland Warren and down to the river, we saw another Hobby. Just before home we watched a pair of pipits displaying. Finally we arrived back at Kings Oven, 5 hours, 6 miles (by my pedometer) and 44 species. All in all a good day out.

Lyndon Savage.

AYLESBEARE COMMON, Tuesday 17th June

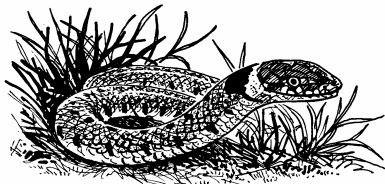
A small group of six met up with Charles Reed, the RSPB Assistant Warden for a morning tour of part of the Common. We were pleased to welcome a visitor and hopefully a future new member of our local group.

After a brief introduction to the history and management of the reserve we set off in search of some of its treasures. We were soon rewarded by a close view of a Dartford Warbler posing beautifully on top of a gorse bush – a first for our visitor – and we also saw Stonechats, Buzzards, Ravens croaking overhead, a Willow Warbler, Yellowhammers and Chiffchaff.

However, in addition to seeing the birds, and with the benefit of having Charles as our guide, we were thrilled to see many dragon and damselflies at one of the pools. These included the huge Emperor, Common blue, Heeled Skimmer, Four-spot Chaser and a rare sighting of a Demoiselle, our largest damselfly, followed by a tenerelle, (a newly emerged Demoiselle) drying its wings. A Green Hairstreak butterfly also posed nicely for us.

Charles also showed us some of the plants which grow on the Reserve, including the insectivorous Sundew, three types of heather, two types of gorse, Purple moor grass and at the end of the tour a small patch of Common Gromwell.

A highlight for the group (no not a rare bird!), was



when Charles lifted the corrugated iron sheets in place on the ground and we saw a bright emerald green Grass Snake slither off, a female Adder curled up under another and a large, beautifully marked, male Adder under the fifth sheet.

We all had a wonderful morning thanks to Charles and to the weather which stayed dry and sunny until we had finished. We learned a lot about one of our now rare heathland habitats and about the birds, insects, mammals and flowers, none of which exist in isolation but are all part of the food chain and are all interdependent on each other.

Thank you John for organising the visit. Please arrange another one and hopefully more people will come to enjoy a gem in Devon's landscape.

Jeanne Silvestri

GROUP CONTACTS

Leader	John Allan	01626 821344
Newsletter	Stella Beavan	01363 881360
Treasurer	Chris Steele	01392 258786
Membership	Liz Saunders	01392 832080

Web site address www.exeter-rspb.org.uk

LOOKING FORWARD

For outdoor meetings, weatherproof clothing and waterproof footwear are recommended

Sunday 10th August Bowling Green Marsh

Morning meeting for waders, ducks, and anything else that turns up!

Meet at 9.00 am at Holman Way Car Park, Topsham (SX968881)

Please do not park on the approach road to Bowling Green.

Car park charge.

Toilets on Topsham Quay.

Saturday 6th September Prawle

We will be leaving an hour earlier than normal to give us the best chance of seeing a variety of autumn migrants as well as the local Cirl Buntings.

Meet at Clyst St Mary car park (SX972911) at **7.30 am** or East Prawle village car park (SX781362) at **9.00 am**.

Cafe and toilets by village green.

Bring packed lunch.

Tuesday 9th September

'Local Raptors or are they?' Ed Drewitt

Ed Drewitt works at Bristol's City Museum & Art Gallery as a museum learning officer during the day

and in his own time leads walks, talks, boat cruises, bird courses and writes for wildlife magazines/journals. In this illustrated talk, Ed reveals facts about the lives of many of our familiar birds of prey, which most of us will find surprising. He is a popular & well respected speaker.

URC Hall, Southernhay, Exeter 7.30pm

Refreshments, raffle, RSPB sales goods, produce, bird food sales.

Admission:- Members £3. Non-members £4

Sunday 21st September Coach trip to Portland

An all-day coach trip to Portland. We plan to visit a couple of sites on the Isle of Portland, and the RSPB Lodmoor nature reserve near Weymouth. We will leave Exeter bus station at 8.30am or Honiton at 9.00 am, returning to Exeter about 7.00 pm.

Must be pre-booked.

Cost: £16 per person. Please book through Richard Swinbank, at a group meeting or by post.

To book by post, we will need the following: your name; number of places wanted; full telephone number (in case of queries, or emergencies); cheque payable to "RSPB Exeter Group"; and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Please mail bookings to: Richard Swinbank, 9 Broad Oak Close, West Hill, Ottery St Mary, EX11 1XW **before 1st**

13

September. Booking confirmations and further details will be mailed out in early September.

Sunday 12th October

Otter estuary

A morning walk by the Otter river, including seaside and farmland birds.

Meet 9.00 am at Lime Kiln car park, Budleigh Salterton (SY073820).

Toilets 100m from car park. Car Park charge.

Tuesday 14th October

AGM followed by:

'The Birds of Torbay' Mike Langman

Mike has been a local birdwatcher in Torbay for 35 years. The bird scene has changed dramatically in the bay in these decades & Mike will review birds & birdwatching in that period. He will also tell us a little about the original RSPB local group in Torbay. Mike has worked on nearly 20 books for many publishers & also paints for the RSPB Magazine, Nature Centres, Wildlife Trusts and all the UK Birding Magazines. He worked at the RSPB Headquarters for 8 years.

URC Hall, Southernhay, Exeter 7.30pm

Refreshments, raffle, RSPB sales goods, produce, bird food sales.

Admission:- Members donation. Non-members £4

Thursday 30th October

'From Black Desert to Silver Meadow' Damon Bridge

Damon is the RSPB warden of West Sedgemoor & Greylake. His talk will give us an insight into the formative years of the new reserve of Greylake & explain how it evolved from arable fields into a wetland. We will learn about the exciting changes this has brought to the wildlife in the area & the hopes for the future.

This is a joint meeting with East Devon Birds

All Saints Church Hall Sidmouth 7.30pm

Refreshments, raffle, RSPB sales goods, produce, bird food sales.

Admission:- Members £3. Non-members £4

Tuesday 28th October

Exminster Marshes

Morning field trip for birds on the marshes, and estuary.

Meet at RSPB car park (SX953872) at 10.00am.

No toilets.

Tuesday 11th November

'Birds of Lesvos' Oliver Smart

Oliver will take us on a wonderful tour of the Greek Island of Lesvos, which is probably the very best place to witness birds on their spring migration to northern Europe. He will use stunning digital pictures of birds & the habitats used both by migrant & resident species.

Oliver moved to digital equipment in 2003 and the change has proved dramatic with images published

for the Scottish Wildlife Trust & Bird Watching magazines as well as the RSPB.

URC Hall, Southernhay, Exeter 7.30pm

Refreshments, raffle, RSPB sales goods, produce, bird food sales.

Admission:- Members £3. Non-members £4

14th-17th November

Weekend away to Anglesey and Conwy

A birdwatching trip led by Keith and Linda Offord, of Wild Insights.

SEE ARTICLE BY RICHARD IN MAIN BODY OF NEWSLETTER

Saturday 22nd November

Christmas Fayre

St. Margaret's Church, Topsham

10.00am – 12.00 noon.

There will be stalls selling RSPB Sales Goods and Bird Food, books and many other items. A raffle will be held and Refreshments will be available.

Admission is only 20p

Saturday 29th November

Broadsands and Passage House Inn

All day field meeting for grebes, auks, divers and winter migrants.

Meet at Clyst St Mary at 8.30 am, Broadsands car park (SX892572) at 9.30 am.

Toilets at Broadsands.

Bring packed lunch.

Tuesday 2nd December

'Scotland the Wilderness on your Doorstep' Ian Rowlands

Ian worked for the RSPB and wildlife trusts for many years, at places such as Minsmere, Titchwell, Loch Garten and Dartmoor before, 16 years ago, moving to the Highlands of Scotland. Here he co-founded well-known, Scottish-based wildlife tour company Speyside Wildlife. A tour-leader, writer and lecturer, Ian is passionate about birds, mammals, eco-tourism, conservation and, above all, our wonderful wilderness areas, and tonight he'll be talking to us about Speyside, in the heart of the Highlands, with its ancient Caledonian pines, sparkling lochs, sweeping moors and towering Cairngorm mountains & home to Capercaillie, Golden Eagle, Crested Tit, Ptarmigan, Scottish Crossbill, Slavonian Grebe and many more. Then it's out to the coastline, including the Moray Firth, the weed-strewn shores of the west coast, and an island 'taster', where seabirds, Sea Eagles, Otters and Minke Whales are the stars

URC Hall, Southernhay, Exeter 7.30pm

Refreshments, raffle, RSPB sales goods, produce, bird food sales.

Admission:- Members £3. Non-members £4

EXETER AND DISTRICT RSPB LOCAL GROUP

Annual General Meeting 2008

Tuesday 14th October 2008 at 7.30 pm at United Reform Church Hall, Southernhay, Exeter.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Approval of minutes of last AGM.
3. Matters arising
4. Group Leaders report.
5. Treasurers report
6. Annual Subscription Rate
7. Election of Officers
8. A.O.B

FOLLOWED BY

'The Birds of Torbay'

an illustrated talk by

Mike Langman

RSPB EXETER LOCAL GROUP
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2007

**Minutes of the meeting held at 7.30 pm on Tuesday 9 October 2007 at United Reform Church Hall,
Southernhay, Exeter**

Chair: John Allan, Group Leader

1. Apologies for absence

Penny Avant, Stella Beavan, Carolyn Channing, Jill and Peter Hitchcock, Katherine Holroyde, Trevor and Ruth Priest, Val Palmer

2. Minutes of last AGM

Proposed: Liz Saunders; Seconded: Jo Le Roux. Minutes accepted as true record

3. Matters arising

None

4. Group Leader's Report

As we have come to expect, we have again had a busy year with much achieved.

At the last AGM I announced that we had at last found a new Secretary. Shortly afterwards he resigned for personal reasons and, again, we have had to manage without one. My grateful thanks go to Nicky Huckle from the Exe Reserves who has been taking minutes at our committee meetings for the last few months.

During the past year we have again assisted on Avocet Cruises, had a very successful Peregrine watch, shown the public the birds at Bowling Green on a weekly basis and been able to recruit new members to the RSPB and to the Group at these events. Additionally we have assisted on a number of occasions at Regional Office events at Berry Head. United Reformed Church has just celebrated the 50th anniversary of its rebuild and we had a stand there showing a little of the history of the Group.

The last Xmas Fayre organised by Val Palmer and the first Spring Fayre organised by Pam Hancock were again successful events and with the 100 club, indoor meetings and RSPB sales goods we were again able to donate a large sum to the RSPB projects, details of which will be given in the Treasurers report.

We have again had some excellent speakers at our indoor meetings which have been reflected in high attendances and our field trips have been highly successful with good turnouts even when the weather has not been at its best.

The position of Campaigns Organiser was a new one created at last years AGM and I am pleased with the way it has gone. It has meant that the national campaigns are given more focus at Group level and that signing of petitions etc. are made easier for those members attending indoor meetings. I am sure that this area can be developed further over the coming year at the various events we take part in.

Group membership stands at 472, not as high as it has been but still healthy.

As usual I should like to thank all committee members for their hard work and commitment but this year I think a special thank you is due to our retiring treasurer. Tony has not only done the job of Treasurer effectively and reliably but has computerised the system, helped in the computerisation of membership records and the setting up of standing order subscriptions and set up the Group web site which, from the telephone calls I receive, I can vouch is well used by the public at large. We wish him well in his new house and in his mobile home!

I should also like to thank all other helpers who beaver away behind the scenes helping to make things run smoothly.

I have now completed 4 years as Group Leader out of my 5 year term and, whilst I could put my name forward for election for a further term next year, I have decided that, although I have thoroughly enjoyed doing the job, it would not be the right thing for me or the Group for me to continue. The Group Leader job will, therefore, need filling at the next AGM and, ideally, it would be great if someone would offer their services soon so that they could 'shadow' me over the coming year. They would not have to do things as I have done them but it would give them a good insight into the workings of the Group.

I want to make three points clear. It is possible for a Group to exist without a Group Leader but the evidence from elsewhere shows that it is very difficult and can throw a heavy burden on the rest of the committee. Secondly, there is no need for a Group Leader to get as involved in as many of the aspects as I do. A Group can be run effectively without the Group Leader participating in things like Bowling Green, Avocet cruises and Peregrine watch. I do it because I enjoy doing it! The day to day running of the Group is the 'essential bit'.

Finally the continuing existence of the Group is down to *you*, its members. It is *your* Group. As I have already said, the existing committee members work hard at what they do. In my opinion, it would be unreasonable to expect them to take on the tasks of Group Leader in addition to their existing roles. Please contact me if you want any further information or explanation.

Proposed: Fred Jago; Seconded: Roger Tucker; Report accepted

5. Treasurer's Report – Year ending 31st March 2007

Charity Account

This is the account where the majority of the financial activities take place and where all monies raised are paid directly into an RSPB account. This allows the RSPB to have direct control on any monies raised under its name which is a requirement of the Charities Act.

Income:

Our overall income was up by around £425 (amounts have been rounded to nearest £5). This income included £200 from the Group account.

Donations remained same at £690

Group subscriptions up by £430

due to maintaining membership levels and the increase in subscription fees in 2006 paid after March (End of Year)

Meetings income is down by £250 despite the good attendances and excellent speakers (thanks to Carolyn Channing for organising these)

Fundraising events were up by £155

100 club up by £370

fayres down £200

Coffee morning down £15 (thanks to Liz Saunders for organising these)

Sales of bird food down by £60 (our thanks to Steve Elcoate for his hard work on this)

Expenditure

Our overall expenditure was down (again) by £160.

Meetings, costs down by £165

Newsletters cost down by £125 due to continued savings from members downloading the newsletters

Fund raising events, cost down by £140

Other expenditure roughly the same: Includes audit fee of £125 which will no longer be incurred

Donations to the RSPB increased by £250 to £3750

£2500 to general maintenance expenses Exe Reserve

£750 to the Greylake Reserve

£500 to general reserves in the South West

Group account

The financial activity of this account remains at a low level as it is principally used for events which are not open to the public.

Events profits (£'s):	Church Farm	-76.00
	Brownsea Island	-11.00
	Norfolk trip	-115.00
	Seaton Tramway	0.00
	Kent Trip	202.00

Any excess in funds is periodically transferred to the Charity account. £200 was transferred this year

The main expenditure from this account was a payment of £185 for public liability insurance

RSPB Sales

Sales of £1752 (up from £1523) enabled £613 to be allocated to the Hope Farm project. Our thanks to Marilyn Steel for her continuing hard work

Conclusion

It has been a very successful year with the group contributing some £4365 to the RSPB. The treasurer thanked the members and the committee for their efforts in raising this amount.

Proposed: Richard Swinbank; Seconded: Ray Lovett; The report was accepted

6. Subscriptions

It was proposed by the Committee that subscriptions remain at the same level for the next year and agreed unanimously.

7. Election of Officers

Treasurer: Chris Steel

Proposed: Bobby Martin, Seconded: John Adey, Elected unopposed

The positions of Secretary and Publicity Officer remained vacant

All other officers to continue in post from last year:

Field meetings organiser: Richard Swinbank

Indoor meetings organiser: Carolyn Channing

Membership Secretary: Liz Saunders

Display Organiser: Pat Thomson

Campaigns Organiser: Penny Avant

Newsletter Editor: Stella Beavan

Sales goods Organiser: Marilyn Steel

Proposed: Rob Nicholls, Seconded: Mark Baker, This was accepted

8. Any Other Business

Sue requested volunteers to help with the teas.

The meeting closed at 7.50pm

EXETER AND DISTRICT RSPB MEMBERS GROUP

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER 2008 ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The following committee posts (except the secretary who can serve up to three years without re-election) have to be filled by annual election at each AGM.

The posts are listed below with a nomination slip for your use. Each nomination must be supported by two members of the local group and signed by the nominee.

<u>Post</u>	<u>Current Postholder</u>
Newsletter Editor	Stella Beavan
Sales Goods Organiser	Marilyn Steel
Field Meetings Organiser	Richard Swinbank
Indoor Meetings Organiser	Carolyn Channing
Membership Secretary	Liz Saunders
Publicity Officer	
Displays Organiser	Pat Thomson
Secretary	Jane Spencer
Campaigns Organiser	

The Group Leader (John Allan) and the Treasurer (Chris Steel) are approved centrally and are not subject to annual re-election

All the above postholders are prepared to stand for re-election.

.....

Nomination slip, to be returned to John Allan, Coxland-by-Sigford, Sigford, near Newton Abbot, TQ12 6LE by Friday 3 October 2008.

Committee Post Name of Nominee

.....

Nominated by (*first signature*)

(*please print name also*)

Nominated by (*second signature*)

(*please print name also*)

Signature of nominee

(*please print name also*)

Please photocopy this form if you wish to make more than one nomination