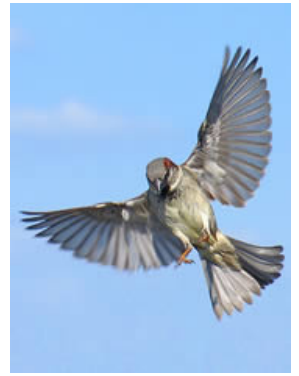




EXETER AND DISTRICT LOCAL GROUP



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

NEWSLETTER No 141

AUTUMN 2010

a million voices for nature

EDITORIAL

As I write this, in my study next to the conservatory, I have the company of a male house sparrow who has learned the trick of coming in through the conservatory windows to have a look for whatever delights have appears since last time he looked! Over the winter I was awoken nearly every morning by a wren doing the same thing and announcing its presence in a very loud voice! A real privilege to be allowed to be that close.

Our group AGM will be held on 12 October and the papers are included at the end of this newsletter. The AGM will be very short and will be followed by a talk by Peter Exley who is a wonderful speaker so please do come along. As it is the AGM the meeting does not have a charge but we still have to hire the hall and incur the usual costs so donations on the door would be very welcome.

I have been Newsletter Editor now for nearly 20 years. My first issue (as temporary newsletter editor!) was number 69 and dated Summer 1992. I feel that nearly 20 years, one editorship is more than enough for any group and hence I will not be standing for re-election this year. I will, of course,

produce the October issue of this year (Number 142) but that will be my last. I would like to thank very much all those who have contributed so much over the years and those who have given such kind comments during the course of my tenure. I'm sure that the next editor will be warmly received and I, as well as I'm sure everyone else, look forward to a new and fresher style. If anyone would like to have a talk to me about doing the job or to know more about it I am more than happy to have a chat – by email contact initially please. One thing – it is not really possible to do this job without a computer and broadband.

The deadline for the next issue is **11th October 2010** 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 REPORT

This spring I have managed to achieve two of my birding wants. Firstly my wife and I spent a week in Cumbria and had great views of the nesting ospreys on Bassenthwaite. It seems highly possible that these are the same birds that we see over Bowling Green later in the year. There were three adult birds, the second male was probably one of last year's brood as the original male was not particularly concerned over its presence.

Then a couple of weeks ago at my third attempt I saw the Cornish



choughs. I sat on the cliffs on the Lizard patiently waiting for a couple of hours, watching gannets fly by, rock pipits and a lone Manx shearwater, to be rewarded by close views of a pair of choughs flying right below me. I felt the wait had been truly worthwhile. The house where we were staying in Cornwall had a swallows nest in the porch and I was able to spend hours watching the parents feeding the chicks and encouraging them to fly. The day after we left to come home they fledged.

The Spring Fayre was again held in May with the amazing

sum of £662.94 raised. Well done to all who helped and contributed in whatever way. I must particularly thank Rosemary Partridge who on toiletries and jewellery raised £280.45 in no small part due to her having held a coffee morning prior to the event. Super job, thanks again Rosemary.

The autumn programme looks exciting and I hope to see many of you on some of the field trips and at the AGM.

Roger Tucker.

BIRDWATCHING WEEKEND AT THE DEE ESTUARY

Next March we are planning a special bird watching weekend around the Dee Estuary. Keith and Linda Offord will be leading this trip, along the same lines as our weekend in Anglesey in November 2008.

The weekend will start with dinner on Friday 4th March and finish at lunchtime on Monday 7th. We will be staying at the Mollington Banastre hotel, near Chester. The cost will be £345 for a twin or double room, with a £30 single supplement. This will include three nights dinner bed and breakfast, packed lunches, transport in minibuses, a contribution to our local group's liability insurance & expenses, and services of the leaders. We will travel to and from the Dee Estuary in our own cars; I will arrange car sharing nearer the time for those that are interested.

I have sent information about the trip to all those who came on the Norfolk weekend early this year, and to others who requested details. I'd be happy to send details to anyone else who is interested; please see me at a meeting, or give me a ring on 01404 813666. There are a limited number of places - a maximum of 20 (plus the two leaders). Please book as soon as possible, so that we can secure the hotel rooms

Richard Swinbank

BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH 2010

2010 has been another great year for Big Garden Birdwatch, with more than half a million people taking part. Nearly 530,000 people counted 8.6 million birds in more than 280,000 gardens over the weekend of 30-31 January. These fantastic figures include the 75,500 children and teachers from nearly 2,000 schools who took part in Big Schools' Birdwatch – a great result all around.

The house sparrow retained its top spot for the seventh year running and the blackbird rose from third to second place. The starling dropped to third – the first time it has been out of the top two in more than ten years. Some of the UK's most familiar species continue to suffer huge declines. In just the last five years alone, the house sparrow has declined by 17% and the starling by nearly 14%.

The survey helped us get an idea of how the bad weather at the start of the year affected bird populations. As predicted, small-bodied birds like the long tailed tit, coal tit and goldcrest were the worst affected, with average numbers of all three species dropping significantly compared to 2009. Smaller birds are particularly susceptible to cold weather and during it have to eat almost continuously to stay alive.

The weather was also responsible for many of us spotting more countryside birds like redwing, fieldfare, bullfinch and yellowhammer in our gardens. More usually found in fields and farmland trees and hedgerows, it's believed these birds visited our gardens to search for food when they couldn't find enough in their usual haunts. As well as redwings and fieldfares, other members of the thrush family, including song thrush, mistle thrush and blackbird, were seen in much higher numbers this year, also looking for food.

NATIONAL CIRC BUNTING SURVEY

In 2009 the latest National Circ Bunting Survey took place. The survey involved the efforts of two fieldworkers, and many volunteers, who covered a

large area of coastal South Devon, together with a few outlying areas in Cornwall, North Devon, Dorset and the Mendips. The survey took place between April and August and involved surveyors walking over 3000km of footpaths and roads in the search for these colourful birds.

The efforts paid off with the population now estimated at 862 territories, a fantastic increase of 24% since the last survey in 2003. Much of this increase has occurred within their core range in south Devon. Particularly encouraging are the increases around the upper Kingsbridge Estuary, inland from Dawlish and the isolated population in the upper Teign Valley. Also of note is a pair that successfully bred on the east side of the River Exe in east Devon, the first for over 20 years (although a male was seen in east Devon during the 2003 survey), and a pair just across the Devon border at Rame Head in Cornwall. The latest news from east Devon is that the pair recorded in 2009 is still there which is really good news and hopefully a sign that the species is on its way to becoming established in this area.



LANDMARK DEAL FOR WILDLIFE IN EAST DEVON



The RSPB has just taken on management of Lympstone Common. This landmark deal will enable the national wildlife charity to bring East Devon's last remaining unrestored heath back into pristine condition.

Tony Richardson, Regional Director for the RSPB in the south west

said; "We have been working hard in East Devon for more than two decades to bring the heathland back to life. Working closely with Clinton Devon Estates, the local council and Natural England we have had huge success.

On places such as Aylesbeare and Woodbury Commons people can now enjoy the company of once rare creatures such as Dartford warbler, nightjar and silver-studded blue butterflies. Lympstone Common, to us, is the last piece of a rather large jigsaw and we are thrilled to be signing the lease.."

The 30ha common lies a couple of miles to the north east of Exmouth. Although it is part of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths Site of Special Scientific Interest, the gradual encroachment of trees and scrub has severely reduced its wildlife interest over the years. Improving the site to allow the natural regeneration of heather and gorse will be a high priority for the RSPB.

Natural England, who have ambitious targets for bringing SSSIs into favourable condition for wildlife, are delighted that the RSPB are starting work on the site.

Ciaran Gannon, Regional Director for Natural England in the south west said: "We are extremely pleased that the RSPB will be restoring this area of the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths SSSI to its former glory.

The new management arrangements will deliver a significant boost for the unique heathland wildlife and will ensure the site is accessible for local people to enjoy.

Natural England very much hopes that this site will in due course add to the existing Environmental Stewardship funding agreements we already have with the RSPB on the Pebblebed Heaths."

Tony Richardson said: "The East Devon heaths are great places to visit; packed with heritage, wildlife and great views. Once restored, Lympstone Common will not only be of huge benefit to rare and unique wildlife it will also provide spectacular views of open heathland."

GORGE-OUS YOUNG PEREGRINES!

Under the careful eye of visitors, RSPB and staff at Cheddar Gorge and Caves the gorge's resident pair of peregrines has produced three youngsters this year.

Katy Holvey, Information Warden for the RSPB at Cheddar said: "Mum and dad have been busy over the past few weeks keeping them fed, and the chicks have just taken their first tentative flights!

"While flying seems to be instinctive to these amazing birds, landing is not so easy! They're also having a little trouble with hunting for themselves.

The adults have been trying to teach them by passing them prey they've caught, but this doesn't seem to be going so well at the moment.

There have been incidents of deceased birds, their main prey, descending at high speed towards the ground as the chicks fail to keep hold of them."

Over the next few months the adult peregrines will be teaching their offspring how to successfully hunt and survive on their own.

The RSPB is inviting visitors to come and join them at Cheddar to watch these magnificent raptors learning essential skills, and making a few mistakes along the way.

There will be special Peregrine Watches every Wednesday and Saturday from now until the end of August, from 4pm to 6pm [see notes below for details]

The RSPB will also be running one of its popular Peregrines and Pies event on 4th August. This will involve a guided walk around the gorge followed by pie and mash at Cheddar Cave's Explorer's Cafe Bar, run by the Cheddar Caves and Gorge Company.



SONGBIRDS AND THEIR PREDATORS

Results from the biggest ever analysis of songbirds and their predators have just been published.

This research, led by scientists from the British Trust for Ornithology and funded by SongBird Survival, uses information made available by partners in the Breeding Bird Survey (which includes the RSPB), and the Common Birds Census.

By looking at how prey and predator numbers have changed over nearly forty years, the researchers have been able to see if there are associations between trends for particular prey species and their predators in England. This is the most sophisticated, long-term and large-scale analysis of its kind ever undertaken. It examines the effects of three predators of juvenile and adult birds (buzzard, sparrowhawk and kestrel) and of five nest predators (great spotted woodpecker, magpie, jay, carrion crow and grey squirrel).

The good news is that almost all species are cleared of having any large-scale impact on populations of their prey species. For 22 of the 29 prey species examined, there was no statistically significant link between the increase of predator numbers and the decline of prey numbers. So, for the majority of prey species examined, the study provides no evidence that population changes have resulted from changes in predation.

Some relationships do bear further investigation. In particular, the increase in the number of sparrowhawks during the period 1967–2000 and declines in the abundance of bullfinches, tree sparrows and reed buntings, are worthy of further study.

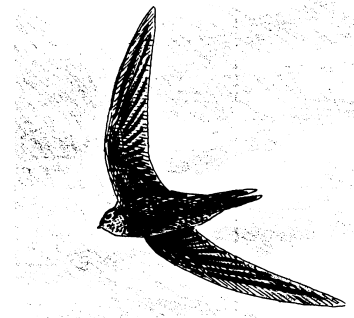
Interestingly, there were a large number of positive associations between some predators and prey! This suggests that predator numbers have largely increased as the amount of prey has increased, and is particularly the case for great spotted woodpecker, magpie, jay and carrion crow. This is great, as it largely exonerates these predators as driving any declines in songbirds at a national level.

This is a very interesting study, based on unique long-term and large-scale datasets, and has contributed a lot to our understanding of the complex and sometimes controversial relationship between predators and prey. For the majority of songbirds examined, there is no evidence that increases in predators are associated with large-scale population declines. It is also clear that, for the majority of declining species with unfavourable conservation status, population declines appear to be due to factors other than predation, which turns the spotlight back onto changes in farmland and woodland management, as previous studies have suggested.

More details can be found at http://www.bto.org/news/news2010/marapr/Are_predators_to_blame_for_songbird_declines.html.

SWIFTS

We have had a fantastic response to our request in the last newsletter to send us sightings of swift nest sites and screaming parties. Thank you all so much. It is still not too late to submit sightings and now should be good timing as young may still be in the nest but being fed which makes noticing the nest site easier. Also screaming parties are larger now and more difficult to miss. You can submit your sightings on the web site at: www.rspb.org.uk/helpswifts Do have a go, and if you haven't tried before – it's easier than you think!



THE 100 CLUB

Congratulations to the following winners for the last months.

March

£5: Mr P.Fogg
Mr P Grimshaw
Mr G and Mrs E Smith
Mr JK and Mrs VM Swain
Mr C and Mrs M Steele

April

£5 Mr and Mrs Collett
Ms Todd and Mr Beer
Miss DF Cave
Mr and Mrs Faraday
Mrs CA Dyer

May

£5: Mr and Mrs WG Voden
Mr K Atkinson
Mr and Mrs Moxon
John Courteney
Mr and Mrs J Turner

June

£5 19 Mrs and Mr Shipley
Miss Dunn
Mrs S Mitchell
Mr C and Mrs M Steel
Sue Collins

CAR SHARING ARRANGEMENTS FOR FIELD TRIPS

As part of environmental charity, we encourage group members to share cars, to reduce our carbon footprint when we go bird watching. Over the past 3 years or so we have been meeting at the Clyst St Mary car park to share cars for the longer-distance field trips. Despite being encouraged to share cars by the Devon County Council and other local authorities, parking restrictions have now been imposed at Clyst St Mary and substantial charges for car-sharer parking have been instigated at the Sowton Park and Ride car park (rather higher than the cost of a bus ticket!).

So, starting with the field trip to Slapton on Sunday 5th September, we will no longer be meeting at Clyst St Mary for car sharing. We hope to put new arrangements in place by then. Please check the website (<http://www.exeter-rspb.org.uk/outdoor.htm>) for the latest information, or give me a ring on 01404 813666.

Richard Swinbank

RESERVE REPORTS

News from RSPB Ham Wall

Once again the bitterns are grabbing all the headlines. They began booming on Feb 8th – even earlier than last year despite the long, cold winter. Up to 6 booming males were recorded at Ham Wall in one morning which has since been repeated on 15th April. On the same morning 4 males were recorded booming on Natural England land and a further 2 at Westhay giving an amazing total of 12 for the Avalon Marshes.

Some interesting interactions between male and female birds have been noted and we are now awaiting the first significant flights that will indicate feeding is taking place.

Elsewhere on site, 3 Glossy Ibis have had a prolonged stay and although one has since disappeared the remaining two are still present and seem very content. We have also been seeing two Great White Egrets within the same area of the reserve.

Over the last couple of weeks the reserve has been receiving good numbers of migrant birds. Large flocks of both Sand and House Martin were followed by groups of Swallows. Chiffchaffs are singing loudly and reed warblers, sedge warblers and blackcaps are building their numbers gradually.

Other sightings of note include: a pair of bullfinches, Marsh Harrier, Treecreeper, Firecrest (since gone), Garganey, bearded tits (although only a few), several otter sightings.

On the drained area in front of the second viewing platform we have seen up to 20 Black-tailed godwits, a few Redshanks and a male Ruff. This is

also a favoured feeding area for the Glossy Ibis and Egrets early in the morning.

Great Crested Grebes have been performing well, with plenty of head bobbing, dancing and presenting of weeds and we now have two nests in great positions for people to observe - one from the screens and one from the first platform.

2 Grasshopper Warblers have been heard on site but we will have to wait and see if they hang around, while the duck numbers are still good with several teal still present and some large groups of pochard also.

Barn Owls are still present on site with a definite pair in the old poly tunnel woods – distantly in front of the first platform and another seen in one of the new boxes visible up the drain from the railway bridge. Some activity has been seen around the central wood barn owl boxes also although a pair of Tawny Owls have taken up residence in one of them.

So there's plenty going on at Ham Wall at the moment and it should be another exciting breeding season coming up.

Steve Couch (Assistant Warden)

West Sedgemoor, Somerset

A fantastic refurbishment of the viewing platform at West Sedgemoor has been completed thanks to Malcolm Cotterill and a number of other volunteers.

Improvement of water management in front of the hide at Greylake produced fantastic views of large numbers of waterfowl and raptors last winter and recently breeding snipe, lapwing & redshank could all be seen and heard from the hide or boardwalk.

12 pairs of snipe were recorded this spring at Greylake another amazing result. Snipe are notoriously difficult to re-establish as a breeding species on wetlands and along with the population on West Sedgemoor increasing the RSPB reserves in Somerset

are becoming the most important place for recovering lowland populations of breeding snipe in England.



**RSPB Exe Estuary Reserve
June 2010**

What a difference the sun makes, although we will soon all be shouting for rain, the recent spell of dry and bright weather has meant visits to the reserves have been popular with tourists and locals alike. It is a super time of year and it feels like the sites are alive; as young birds with their dusky plumage bob along the hedgerows, purposeful dragonflies hawk the ditches and butterflies soak up the sun's rays. Despite the dry weather, the blossom particularly of the dog rose has decorated the hedges and the creamy, white flowers of the hawthorn have remained plentiful through the early part of the month. Although many areas in the county are now looking parched the improved water control across the wetland areas means the fields remain green and lush. The tussocks of rush are just starting to put on a second spurt of growth and we now try to persuade our cattle to eat the less desirable vegetation. The new water level regime has kept our ditches and pools topped up which has provided essential feeding for our breeding wader chicks on their muddy margins.



There was a good take up for the Labrador Bay walk though so hopefully the joint advertising is starting to pay dividends. Our autumn events have now been set, these include trips to Bowling green and Darts in addition to Exminster, so it will be interesting to compare sites too – all helpful information in seeing what works to help us plan for the future.

Work with Jenny Lockett from the Exe Estuary Partnership has continued to be very successful this month, with the joint education days based at the Turf pub going very well. We completed three days this month with 64 children attending, once again looking at comparisons between salt and freshwater invertebrates.

Work with the Development Team has led to opening up new funding opportunities for some of the work that we want to achieve quickly to improve access at Bowling Green Hide. This has resulted in application being put together for planning permission to install a disabled parking bay and viewpoints alongside the road. Options for other funding for potentially larger works are also being pursued and it excellent to move closer to a position of taking things forward. Meetings with the local councils to resolve some of the footpath issues have gone very well and we are at the stage of waiting for prices from contractors, with plans to undertake the work in the next few months. This would resolve flooding on the Turf path and replace some of the rather rickety bridges to Topsham Lock

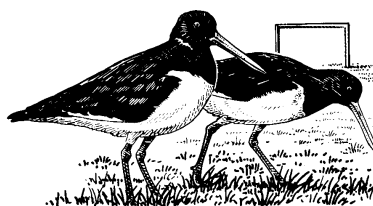
Cottage which go across the middle of Exminster Marshes. There is also potentially good news on the surfacing of Station Road but I will save the details for next month when I know more.

After an excellent meeting with Natural England to review the HLS agreement ideas for the future management of the land at Powderham were discussed, together with additional access options that could be added in. It is hoped that as well as getting improved management of the arable land and lapwing plots we will also bring in more income. With the increased community work we are doing now, the education option alone will be worth at least £2,500.

With the sensitive time of the breeding season now coming to an end plans to undertake the rush control work are taking shape. Applications for weed-wiping have been made and quotes for cutting baling and removing the standing rush are coming in. The briquetting as an after use is developing slowly but it is hoped with the removal work being undertaken a lot earlier and in drier conditions briquetting the end product will be far easier this year.

Breeding bird surveys on all land holdings are now complete and we are still in the process of totting up the figures, however the heads up is that our lapwings numbers are down, with 13 pairs, compared to 15 in 2009 and although there were redshank present at the beginning of the season no attempts were made to breed which is the first time for at least 5 years. However talking to Harry at West Sedgemoor it may be that there are other issues as well as range, such as predation that we may need to consider, based on the findings they have in Somerset. This is something to be picked up in the annual review meeting and the management plan review which is due to take place early September. However on a more positive note, the

pair of oyster-catchers on the land at Darts Farm managed to hatch 1 egg amongst the rows of potatoes!!



Sally Mills
Site Manager,
Exe Estuary Reserve Office 01392 824614

Labrador Bay

Since the purchase of Labrador bay, the new RSPB reserve just south of the Teign estuary, a great deal of habitat management has been underway. Scrub clearance, hedgerow management and fencing have all been taking place with the aim of providing the best habitat for curlew buntings. Dartmoor ponies

have also been introduced to maintain the optimal grazing at the site. During the curl bunting survey in 2009, 7 pairs were recorded at the reserve proving that all the hard work is paying off.

RSPB PROJECTS

South West Farmland Bird Initiative

SWFBI is an exciting initiative working with the farming community and other partners to deliver positive habitat management across some 400,000ha of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Dorset landscape. These areas are nationally important for farmland birds and other wildlife found within the wider countryside.

The Initiative consists of four projects each led by a partner organisation, targeting the Cotswolds, North Wessex Downs, South Wiltshire and Dorset. The RSPB has a post in North Wessex and has a vital role on the steering group for the other posts ensuring appropriate advice and management is available across the region.

The South West Farmland Bird Initiative is funded and supported by:

Natural England, Defra, RSPB, FWAG, Cotswolds Conservation Board, North Wessex Downs AONB, Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, Dorset AONB, Dorset Biodiversity Partnership, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, National Farmers Union, Country Landowners and Business Association, Plantlife International, The Wildlife Trusts, National Trust and Defence Estates.

The project concentrates on six bird species, the 'Arable 6', and hotspots for arable plants. The 'Arable 6' are grey partridge, lapwing, turtle dove, yellow wagtail, tree sparrow and corn bunting. These farmland specialists have suffered the most severe population declines.

Providing habitat for these birds will also have major benefits for other farmland species like the skylark, yellowhammer and brown hare, and in also provide conditions that will help rare arable plants. Through

Otterhead Lakes 23rd April 2010.

About a dozen of us assembled in the woodland car park. It was a lovely morning and was a joy to go out and birdwatch. We spent some time looking at a large tree in a small garden, and there were birdfeeders beside it. We saw Great, Blue, Coal and Marsh Tits. There were excellent views of Nuthatch in the tree and a Great Spotted Woodpecker appeared and showed well. A pair of

the use of agri-environment schemes or independently, land managers are being encouraged to adopt measures that provide nesting habitat, summer and winter food (the 'Big 3') for farmland birds. In 'hot-spot' areas for rare arable plants, the project is promoting measures such as cultivation of headlands to encourage the germination of some of the UK's scarcest plants.

The Great Crane Project.

The project moves on apace with around twenty birds now ready for release in Somerset around mid September. The hatching and rearing has been a great success, with 22 healthy chicks produced from 24 viable eggs.

Many new volunteers have stepped forward to help the project in a whole range of ways, from being trained up to give talks, to assisting with wetland arts projects in local schools, to physically helping with the construction of the pre-release enclosure, and to help monitor the birds once they are



out and about in the wild! I have been amazed at the positive response the project has elicited from the community. It is wonderful that so many are so keen to see the project succeed and to get cranes back where they once belonged...roll on the autumn! You can follow the progress of the project via blogs, video clips, and still images on the unique great crane project website; www.thegreatcraneproject.org.uk

Damon Bridge

LOOKING BACK

House Martins were nesting in the eaves, and there were Swallows all around. It really felt and sounded like spring. Goldfinches were all about, we had lovely view of them on wires in the sunshine. They are charming birds.

We then went off down the path, and the birds were singing all around us. We heard many Blackcaps, and even saw several, and they tend to be rather difficult to see. Then we managed to both hear and see Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs.

We reached the lake and there was a pair of Swans on an island building their nest. There were several Mallards around a few Teal and the odd Moorhen. The Dabchick did not show, neither did the Dippers and Wagtails at the weir. We watched a Buzzard flying low over the trees, and it had lovely markings. Ravens were flying over, croaking to each other.

It was a lovely walk and we saw a lot, I saw 28 species. Thanks, Ray, for guiding us - you obviously knew Otterhead well.

Ann Crawford

Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

Bill Francis

13th April 2010

Bill Francis is a fellow of the RSPB & a volunteer at Slimbridge.

Sir Peter Scott first came to Slimbridge in 1945. He realised that if our wildlife was to flourish, he had to get the public interested. As well as being a founder of the Wildfowl Trust, he was instrumental in the foundation of the World Wide Fund for Nature. There were white fronted geese at Slimbridge and two lesser white fronted geese were spotted amongst them. Sir Peter realised that this was a good place for birds and decided to move his small collection of wild fowl there.

Constant improvements are being made to the site and the facilities widened. For instance there is now Toad Hall where there are displays of frogs, toads and newts. Swan Lake is being redesigned. Another major work at present is the rerouting of the water supply, so that a water channel runs through the middle of the site, with spurs off to the individual enclosures. At the end the water is recycled and returned to the start. In this way there is a better supply of fresh water to all the enclosures. There is a new canoe safari and a wet play area called Welly Boot Land. There is also a new hide – kingfisher hide. Kingfishers nest in a bank visible from the hide

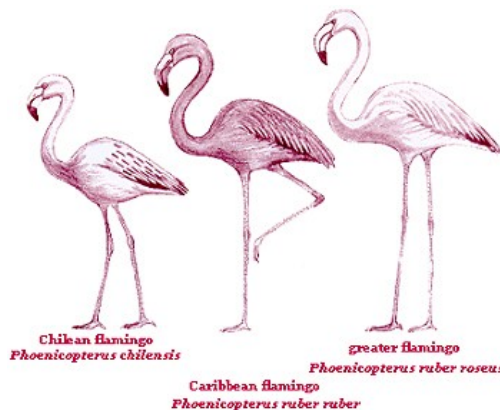


and when they are feeding their young they can be seen coming and going. Other areas include Back from the Brink, showing the

wetlands as they were 10,000 years ago. There are displays of various animals including American river otters, harvest mice, and water voles. Others facilities include a Land rover safari and Puddleduck corner for domesticated geese. This autumn it is hoped to open a new wader lagoon.

There were photographs of various birds in the collection. These included The Carolina Wood Duck, closely related to the Mandarin duck, Crested Screamers from South America, White faced whistling ducks with their very distinctive call and Cape Barren Geese from Australia who can drink sea water.

Slimbridge is the only place in Europe to have all 6 species of flamingo.



There are another eight other wildlife centres in

the United Kingdom: Arundel in Sussex where there are silent electric motor boats which take you around the reed beds. Caerlaverock in Dumfriesshire where there were originally 6000 barnacle geese and numbers have now grown to 30,000. Castle Espie on Strangford Loch in Northern Ireland with the largest concentration of wintering light breasted Brent geese. Llanelli in South Wales on the north bank of the Bristol Channel. The London Wetland Centre (Sir Peter Scott's last project). Here four concrete reservoirs became redundant and were turned into a wetland centre. Despite being under the flight path for Heathrow, little ringed plovers nest and there are resident sand martins in a purpose built bank., Martin Mere in Lancashire, a major wintering ground for pink footed geese. Welney in Norfolk with wintering Whooper and Bewick's swans. Washington in Tyne and Wear with a heronry of 30 pairs.

The Trust is also involved with conservation world wide. Some of these projects include nest boxes for Scaly-sided Mergansers in Siberia, the common crane, the Nene and the Laysan Teal. Several of these species have had young raised at Slimbridge and then returned to their original home. The wildfowl breeding at Slimbridge is carefully controlled. The eggs are artificially raised so the success rate increases to 90%.

At Slimbridge there are 120 acres of collection birds and a further 680 acres outside the wire. In the outside area, White fronted geese over winter and many waders are seen with plenty of rarer visitors. The water flow is controlled by sluice gates to allow areas to become wetter and encourage waders to breed. Pest control is another important task, problems are caused by crows, rats and mink.

Bird ringing is undertaken to help migration studies. Various methods are used to catch the birds

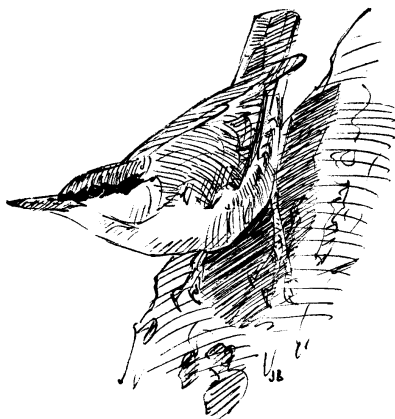
including the Decoy Pool, rocket netting and catching the geese while they are flightless. The Bewick's swans can be recognised by their beak pattern and some individual birds have been recorded on the site for 20 years.

This was an interesting talk on Slimbridge and will certainly enable us to see everything in a new light on our next visit.

Melanie Parker

Otterhead Lakes 23rd April 2010.

About a dozen of us assembled in the woodland car park. It was a lovely morning and was a joy to go out and birdwatch. We spent some time looking at a large tree in a small garden, and there were birdfeeders beside it. We saw Great, Blue, Coal and Marsh Tits. There were excellent views of Nuthatch in the tree and a Great Spotted Woodpecker appeared and showed well. A pair of House Martins were nesting in the eaves, and there were Swallows all around. It really felt and sounded like spring. Goldfinches were all about, we had lovely view of them on wires in the sunshine. They are charming birds.



We then went off down the path, and the birds were singing all around us. We heard many Blackcaps, and even saw several, and they tend to be rather difficult to see. Then we managed to both hear and see Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs.

We reached the lake and there was a pair of Swans on an island building their nest. There were several Mallards around a few Teal and the odd Moorhen. The Dabchick did not show, neither did the Dippers and Wagtails at the weir. We watched a Buzzard flying low over the trees, and it had lovely markings. Ravens were flying over, croaking to each other.

It was a lovely walk and we saw a lot, I saw 28 species. Thanks, Ray, for guiding us - you obviously knew Otterhead well.

Ann Crawford

Church Farm 8th May 2010

Sixteen group members gathered outside Andrew and Jeanne Cooper's lovely house, overlooking a secluded valley between Newton Abbot and the coast. It was a rather grey morning, with bright intervals and occasional light drizzly showers. Before we had even set off on our walk, amid much excitement, a Red Kite was seen drifting slowly overhead, effortlessly riding the breeze. Andrew told us that this was a new species for his farm bird list.

Not so exciting, it was noticed that my car had suffered a very flat rear tyre! With Jeanne Cooper's assistance, the AA were called and their engineer agreed to time his visit so that we would have completed the first part of the walk and be back at the house. This call-out was unfortunately necessary as my car's jack is not 'fit for purpose'.

We walked down a track through fields to an ancient bluebell wood, Andrew told us that there was a regular pair of nesting Sparrowhawks in there. The farm is managed for wildlife under the Countryside Stewardship scheme. Barley is grown especially for seed-eating birds, the crop being cut and left for the wildlife. Andrew explained that in any case access was not suitable for the heavy machinery needed these days to harvest corn.

We learned about the history of the area, the main landowners in the past were the Carew and Courtney families, the farm was originally a deer farm, with no hedges or fences. (There are excellent hedges now.)

Moving on down the fields to the large mill-pond, we gathered under the trees, sheltering from a passing shower whilst we were told about the difficulties encountered in restoring what had been a very silted up and overgrown area, there were many problems using the heavy machinery necessary to do the job. Hard to imagine now, looking at the clear, tranquil water.

We continued down a track, heading towards an open-sided barn, Andrew telling us that there was a pair of barn owls and a pair of kestrels nesting within.



We saw one of the Kestrels fly out as we approached, and it glided away over the fields.

Returning to the farmhouse, we enjoyed coffee and biscuits, plus the chance to browse (and buy) some of Andrew's recent publications. (And yes, the AA turned up on time to change my wheel!).

For the final part of our visit we walked back down the farm driveway to St Blaise church, where Andrew told us some of the history of this beautifully

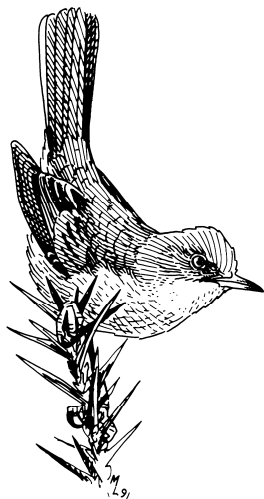
restored medieval building, with its original tombs, flagstones, and other treasures.

This was a very enjoyable morning, with the emphasis of our visit not so much on birds, but on the wildlife and history of this rather special valley.

Liz Saunders

Warren House Inn and Challacombe 23rd May 2010

A small band of enthusiastic people assembled near Warren House Inn, and was it not a lovely day? There was a breeze, which dropped after 2 hours and it became very hot indeed.



It really was the day of the Whitethroat and Redstart. We saw several glimpses of each after about an hour. They appeared and then disappeared. At Challacombe Farm we had excellent views while we had lunch fairly near a nesting box for a Redstart. I have never had some excellent views before. They are summer visitors, spending the

winter in Africa. They usually breed in old deciduous woodland, occasionally in gardens and parks, where there are mature trees. They tend to hide in the trees and bushes, rarely going onto the ground and are usually very difficult to see, most sightings are of dark shapes in among the leaves. They are also found in stonewall country. They are slim, streamlined birds, with an erect posture. They have a grey mantle and a rusty red breast and undertail and a white forehead and black facemask. They nest in holes in trees or on loose stone walls. Laying of 7 or so eggs starts in mid May; incubation period is 2 weeks. They eat insects, beetles, spiders and caterpillars.

For almost the entire walk we heard cuckoos calling. They also were flying, and we saw two very clearly flying overhead, and also one in a tree. They really were exposing themselves. They are typically found near woodlands and farmland. They have bad manners as they are parasitic, laying eggs in Meadow Pipit's and Dunnock's nests. This is well known, but we still love them as they are seen as a harbinger of spring. The other bird we listened to all the way round were Willow Warblers which were singing their hearts out; most seemed to be in Willow Trees, which was very apt.

It was encouraging that there were lots of Whinchats. Last time I went there, two years ago,
10

there were only about 6 pairs in the area. They are smart birds, brown on the back, orange on the chest and a strong white eye supercillium. We saw a lovely one on a fence in the sun. They are summer visitors, spending their winter in Africa. They are typically found in rough pastureland and tussocky grass. They eat insects beetles and craneflies. They nest at the foot of Gorse bushes. The nest is made of moss.

We saw some Spotted Flycatchers and they were my first for the year. There were several of them. No Pied ones were sighted, though. We even saw a Garden Warbler near some gorse bushes. It was a good sighting for once. The trouble is that they are so non-descript.

It was a lovely day out, and those who thought of going, and did not, missed a good days birding. Thanks go to Richard and Mark for finding and identifying birds and generally leading and keeping us in order.

Ann Crawford

Yarner Wood 9th June 2010

On a showery, humid morning 10 birders spent some two and a half hours in this fantastic location for woodland birds. A walk over the heath early on brought excellent views of a Yellowhammer, the yellow really shining out in the sunlight. into the woods where the main objective was to see Pied Flycatchers at the nest boxes. We were not disappointed with some very good views of particularly females feeding the young at several boxes. A good number of Willow Warblers were seen together with that special 'leaf warbler', the Wood Warbler with its so distinctive song. The other spot worthy of particular note was that of a Treecreeper.



A good morning enjoyed by all.

Roger Tucker

Aylesbeare Common 11th July 2010.

Where have all the birds gone?. It was a lovely day, breeze and bright sun. There were lots of butterflies and moths, but remarkably few birds. At one point we saw more species of butterflies than birds.

We had good views of a Tree Pipit. We were first alerted to its presence when we heard its very loud twsee wee wee call in flight and then it parachuted down to a tree. They are summer visitors and live on heaths, with a few large trees where they tend to perch. We saw one later on top of another bush feeding a young one, which was squeaking away, like a rusty door. There are only 2 breeding pairs on the reserve this year, so we did well. They are larger than a Meadow Pipit, and the brown is sandy with dark brown streaks, and not olive. They nest on the ground in depressions on banks and under hedges.



We saw some Dartford Warblers, with their long tails which make them so easy to identify. Last year there were about 24 breeding pairs this year only 12, which is concerning. I believe they are absent or in very low numbers on Exmoor and the

Quantocks, so these must be treasured and act as a bank to get the numbers up again. They have a soft scratching song which we heard. They flit about over the top of the gorse, so are not easy to see. Their favourite food is spiders, which they find in the gorse. They also eat butterflies, moths beetles and even blackberries at times.

We did not see any Stonechats, which was surprising and rather sad, as I have seen very few this year. Talking to people this does seem to be a pattern, but where they have survived two lousy summers and a cold winter, then they are breeding very successfully, so let's hope that nature knows best and things will even out. We heard lots of Wrens, which seem to be everywhere, so they survived the cold winter, but no Goldcrests nor Firecrests around, it would seem.

At the end of the walk we saw a Lesser Redpoll. It was on top of a dead tree, where earlier we had seen a Yellowhammer. It is very similar to a Linnet, and there were a lot of those around, but it is smaller and the back is more streaked, and the red on its head was very obvious. It is resident in England, preferring young conifer plantations. There were young conifers in the area where we saw it, so that fitted. They eat seeds of Alder birch and bulrush as well as "weed seeds". They also like insects, beetles butterflies and moths, and there were plenty of those around. They nest in small bushes, birch conifers and tall heather so the habitat is right for that.

Altogether, 21 species were seen. Normally looking at my records it is nearer 25, so not as bad as I feared, but the numbers were certainly down.

Ann Crawford

GROUP CONTACTS

Leader	Roger Tucker	01392 860518
Secretary	Jane Spencer	01392 823540
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

Saturday 14th August Bowling Green Marsh

Morning meeting for waders, ducks, and anything else that turns up! We also hope to visit the adjacent Goosemoor reserve.
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.

Sunday 5th September Slapton and Start Point

Morning walk at Slapton for autumn migrants and birds on the ley and sea. Afternoon at Start Point or another local site, depending on weather conditions.

Meet for car sharing at 8.30 am (please check the website "outdoor meetings" page <http://www.exeter-rspb.org.uk/outdoor.htm> for meeting place) or Slapton beach car park (charge payable) (SX829442) at 9.45 am.
Toilets next to car park.
Bring packed lunch.

Tuesday 14th September 2010.

'Wild Dorset' - Colin Varndell

Colin has been photographing the landscape & wildlife for over 30 years. His evocative photographs are reproduced in books, magazines, calendars & in advertising worldwide. He has won many awards for his beautiful work. All the pictures in this presentation were taken during a 12 month period to give a 'snapshot' of the natural history & landscapes of Dorset in one calendar year. Subjects included are butterflies, dragonflies, birds, foxes, dormice, roe deer -- to name just a few!
7.30pm URC Hall Southernhay, Exeter
Refreshments, raffle, RSPB sales goods, produce, bird food sales.

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

Saturday 18th September

Axe Estuary reserves

The lower Axe valley is fast developing as one of the best places to see birds in East Devon. This will be an all-day visit, taking in Seaton Marshes, Colyford Common and Black Hole Marsh.

Meet at Colyford Memorial Hall (SY248924) at 9.30am.

Toilets in Seaton.

Bring packed lunch.

Wednesday 6th October

Greylake

A morning visit to this recently-opened RSPB reserve, where we expect to see ducks and wading birds, with a good chance of a Peregrine or other raptors.

Meet 10.00 am at Greylake reserve entrance on A361, between Othery and Greinton (ST399346).

No toilets.

Tuesday 12th October 2010

AGM. Followed by:-

'Turning Up The Volume - a History of RSPB Campaigns. past, present & future' Peter Exley

In this illustrated talk Peter takes a look back at the earliest days of the RSPB as the new wildlife conservation movement slowly found its feet, and then looks at the achievements that have been made up to the present day from stopping the feather trade to saving albatrosses, drawing on his own experience working with the Albatross Task Force

7.30pm URC Hall Southernhay, Exeter

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

Admission:- By donation please

Sunday 17th October

Exminster Marshes

Morning field trip for birds on the marshes and estuary. We may also catch some early winter thrushes.

Meet at RSPB car park (SX953872) at 9.30am.

No toilets.

Thursday 28th October 2010

Mike Tyler will give two talks: 'The Avifauna of Devon' and 'Bird Ringing on the River Axe'

Mike is the current chairman of the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society and the author of the book 'Birds of Devon' due to be published later this year. He has also been involved with ringing on the River Axe for many years. This is a joint meeting with East Devon Birds
7.30pm. All Saints Church Hal. Sidmouth.

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

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

Saturday 30th October

Wembury

Most of the land at Wembury Point was acquired by the National Trust in 2006. We will walk around Wembury Point looking for seabirds, waders and farmland birds. After lunch, we'll probably walk the coast path towards the Yealm estuary.

Meet for car sharing at 8.30 am or 9.30 am in National Trust car park by Wembury beach and Marine Centre (SX518483).

Toilets near car park. Possible car park charge.

Bring lunch.

Tuesday 16th November

Otter Estuary

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

Meet 10.00 am at Lime Kiln car park, Budleigh Salterton (SY073820).

Toilets 100m from car park.

Car park charge, but possible free roadside parking nearby.

Saturday 27th November

Dawlish Warren

A morning walk to see waders and sea birds at Dawlish Warren. High tide in late morning should bring the birds in close to the hide.

Meet in car park (north end, near nature reserve, SX981786) at 9.30 am.

Car park charge.

Toilets near car park.

EXETER AND DISTRICT RSPB LOCAL GROUP

Annual General Meeting 2009

Tuesday 12th October 2010 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

'Turning Up The Volume - a History of RSPB Campaigns. past, present & future'

an illustrated talk by

Peter Exley

AGM 2009

Tuesday 13th October at 7.30 pm at United Reform Church, Southernhay, Exeter

- 1. Apologies:** Mr and Mrs Ford, Mrs Hitchcock, Stan Hancock, Bobby Martin
- 2. Approval of Minutes of last AGM:** Minutes approved as true record and signed
- 3. Matters Arising:** None
- 4. Group Leader's Report**

As I come to the end of my first year as Group Leader I want to pay tribute to the Committee which has served this last year. They have to a man, or woman, worked very hard on your behalf and to great effect and I include in this all those who volunteer in many roles but do not sit on the committee. It would be invidious to name anyone particularly but on your behalf as well as my own I thank all them most sincerely. I am delighted that nearly all have agreed to continue, however there is one Exception. Anne Chapman who has served as Publicity Officer is having to relocate and can therefore no longer continue. Anne has done a sterling job and her notices and posters have been exceptional, we shall sadly miss her. If anyone is willing to take on that role I will be delighted to hear from them. Anne has passed on all the necessary software and drafts and is willing to help the new officer take over.

Sadly the number of local group members is down on last year despite our efforts, and I think that this is probably due to the state of the economy in that several members have resigned from the RSPB and subsequently from the local group. Our membership currently stands at 431. However we did manage to recruit a few new members, not only for the RSPB but for local group as well. Throughout the year we have had members in attendance at Bowling Green Marsh on a weekly basis showing the public the birds. This has again been a great success and popular and I thank Rob Nicholls who is not a member of the committee for his organisation. We have also continued to assist with the Avocet Cruises and although the number of cruises has been reduced these continue to be popular and are generally great fun, particularly when it is freezing cold and pouring with rain!

The committee and I are keen to encourage younger people to get involved and as a first step we have arranged an avocet cruise exclusively for WEX members on Saturday 5 December. If this is the success we hope then we will endeavour to arrange further events for the young members in whose hands the future of the RSPB rests.

The programme of both indoor and outdoor events has been excellent. Future events include talks by Stephen Moss and Dominic Cousins, both of which will I am sure prove popular and the weekend break in Norfolk should be very worthwhile with the chance to see tens of thousands pink footed geese.

Unfortunately we have not yet been able to secure any sponsorship for any of our work but continue to explore the possibilities. One of our achievements of which I am particularly proud has been the erecting of bird feeders at the Children's Hospice at Little Bridge House in North Devon. This is a wonderful facility supported almost entirely by voluntary contribution with wonderful grounds and a diverse bird life which we hope will be enhanced by these feeders.

Once again our main fund raising events have been the Spring and Christmas Fayres. We do not have a fayres organiser currently and I give particular thanks to Val Palmer and Pam Hancock who have taken on the role pro tem. Anyone who feels that they might be able to assume that mantle would be most gratefully received. Please see me after the meeting!

Finally may I thank the team at the RSPB Regional Office for their support and encouragement? Particular thanks to Juliet Simms together with our good wishes as she takes maternity leave. And finally finally my thanks to you the members for your support over the year both in financial terms and in the time given which can only be to the good of the group and the future of the society.

Proposed: John Allan
Seconded: Phil Reader
Report accepted

5. Treasurer's Report– Year ending 31st March 2009

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 is up by around £95 (amounts have been rounded to nearest £5) Income from the Christmas and Spring Fayres totalled £1065 which compares very closely with the total for the previous year (£1060). Income from other fund-raising activities (100 Club) down by £20.

Donations have decreased this year to £640.

Group subscriptions down by £320. Membership now stands at 424 compared with 495 the previous year.

Meetings income, however, is up this year again by £100 thanks to some excellent speakers and steady attendances (thanks to Carolyn Channing for all her hard work in organising these).

We continue to suffer from lack of income from the sale of bird foods due to there being no bird food sales organiser. (A more limited selection of bird foods has recently been made available as part of the RSPB Sales Goods).

Expenditure

Our overall expenditure was down this year by £1370.

Meetings, costs up by £115 due to increased speakers' fees/expenses and the increased cost of hiring Southernhay Church Hall (up from £70 to £80 per session).

Newsletters costs down again, this time by £30 (we have found a cheaper printer).

Fund raising events, costs down just slightly.

Other expenditure has fallen by £260. There is no audit fee. Many thanks to Charles Ford for checking the accounts

Donations to the RSPB stood at £2050. £2000 was allocated to the Exe nature reserves and also continuing support for the successful cirl bunting project. £50 went direct to the Greylake RSPB Reserve following Damien Bridge's excellent talk.

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):

Portland coach trip	31.00
Norfolk	140.00

Any excess in funds is periodically transferred to the Charity account. £500 was transferred this year. Thanks to Richard Swinbank for organising the Group events.

RSPB Sales

Sales of £835.56 (down from £1180) enabled £292.45 to be allocated to the RSPB towards their work with Children and Education. Our thanks to Marilyn Steel for her continuing hard work in organising the RSPB sales goods.

Conclusion

It has been a very successful year with the group contributing some £2050 to the RSPB. The treasurer thanked the members and the committee for their efforts in raising this amount.

Proposed: Roger Saxon

Seconded: Val Palmer

Report accepted

6. Annual Subscription Rate

It was proposed by the Committee that subscriptions remain at the same level for the next year. Agreed unanimously. However, because of the increased cost of hiring the hall for indoor meetings, it was proposed that the indoor meeting fee should increase from April 2010 to £5 non-members, £4 members. Agreed unanimously.

7. Election of Officers

Anne Chapman is moving away from the area and standing down as Publicity Officer. The meeting expressed thanks to Anne for her excellent work. She has produced templates for events posters and other publicity which can be used in future. The post of Publicity Officer is now vacant. The post of Campaigns Organiser is also vacant.

All other officers to continue in post from last year:

Treasurer: Chris Steel

Secretary: Jane Spencer

Membership Secretary: Liz Saunders

Field Meetings Organiser: Richard Swinbank

Indoor Meetings Organiser: Carolyn Channing

Display Organiser: Pat Thomson

Newsletter Editor: Stella Beavan

Sales Goods Organiser: Marilyn Steel

Proposed: Roger Tucker

Seconded: Sue Collins

Accepted

8. AOB

None

The meeting closed at 8pm.

EXETER AND DISTRICT RSPB MEMBERS GROUP

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: TUESDAY 12 OCTOBER 2010 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>
Secretary	Jane Spencer
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	Anne Chapman
Displays Organiser	Pat Thomson
Campaigns Organiser	

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

All the postholders, with the exception of Stella Beavan are prepared to stand for re-election.

.....

Nomination slip, to be returned to Roger Tucker, 17 Hederman Close, Silverton, Exeter, EX5 4HW by Friday 8 October 2010.

Committee Post	Name of Nominee
.....
Nominated by <i>(first signature)</i>
<i>(please print name also)</i>
Nominated by <i>(second signature)</i>
<i>(please print name also)</i>
Signature of nominee
<i>(please print name also)</i>

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