



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 136

SUMMER 2009

a million voices for nature

EDITORIAL

Loads to tell you about this time, and it's all a rush!

I have just returned from Tanzania having been part of a bird ringing and atlas project camping around the Masai Steppe over the last month. This is the season of the 'long rains' which encourages insect life on which the birds rely – the migrants to put on enough fat to complete migration successfully and the resident breeders to obtain sufficient energy to nest build and rear a brood. However we had rain on only two days and obtaining water was a huge problem. Not only for us, of course, but also for the Masai people and their cattle and the resident wildlife. In fact several families had to leave their homes to move their cattle to where there might be water. The rains have only failed once or twice before in living memory and whilst they may just be very late there is always the underlying worry of climate change. These expeditions are always testing (as well as great fun) and this one certainly revealed how little water one could live on and wash oneself and ones clothes! My luxurious bath on my return almost certainly contained more water than

STOP PRESS

SPRING FAYRE

9 May 10am-12noon
St Margaret's Church Hall
Topsham

Come and get some really
interesting plants

Home-made cakes

CDs, Books

and much, much more

my share of the camp water during the previous month. I think the brown colour is a result of the sun!

I had an amazing surprise before I left – a donation to the group specifically to help fund the newsletter. It was superbly generous and a wonderful thought which, for as long as I have been doing the newsletter, has no precedent. Thank you so much.

And another lovely surprise – an unsolicited article from a member who claims to be a non-birder (not sure if I believe it entirely) which is great fun. It

would be lovely to get more articles from members – a perennial hope of mine!

And I've won a prize in the 100 club!! Hope you're all members so you can win too.

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

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NOTES AND NEWS

GROUP LEADER'S COMMENTS

Spring is now well and truly with us and this has been reflected in the birds seen in our area. Ospreys have been hanging around the Exe and the sight of one of these magnificent birds perched while enjoying a fish meal is one not to be missed.

Other migrants are passing through and it seems whenever one goes out there are lots of surprises. We have now come to the end of the indoor meetings for last winter and what great speakers we have been privileged to hear. We start again in September and the speakers for the next season include Stephen Moss and Dominic Couzens, so lots to anticipate. The outdoor events have been

well supported and interesting; sadly the trip to West Sedgemoor had to be cancelled due to the weather, but hopefully can be rearranged for later in the year. On 28th June there is a day trip to Brownsea Island; please book early with Richard as I am sure this will be an excellent trip.

The Spring Fayre and Plant Sale will be held in St Margaret's Church Hall in Topsham on Saturday 9th May. Thanks are due to Val, Charles and Pam for organising the event. Please come along and bring your friends to support one of our major fund raising events of the year.

Finally on a personal note, four of us from the group have recently been birding in southern Spain watching the migration and a brief article about this appears elsewhere in the Newsletter.

I hope that you will all have a great summer with plenty of good birding.

Roger Tucker

SPRING FAYRE AND PLANT SALE



St Margaret's Church,
Topsham
Saturday 9 May 2009
10.00 am - 12.00 noon

Always a popular event, our local group Spring Fayre is well worth a visit. There will

be many stalls including a well-stocked plant stall, as well as RSPB goods, refreshments and a raffle.

Donations of suitable items for any of the stalls will be very welcome. Bric-a-brac, books, bottles, CDs, toys, toiletries and jewellery are needed and we can never have enough **CAKES!!** Also, good quality plants (clearly labelled please!) for our large Plant Stall would be greatly appreciated.

It would be helpful if you could bring donations to the Hall on the morning of the Fayre. If this is not possible, please phone for an alternative to be arranged. The contact numbers are Val Palmer 01392 271791 or Pam Hancock 01884 839987.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Pam Hancock

ARE YOU PEAT FREE?

For many years we have had a policy of only selling plants potted in peat-free compost at our Fayres in the hope that this will encourage our members and visitors to the Fayres to do the same.

With a staggering 94% of lowland peat bog habitats in the UK now destroyed by peat extraction, we are urging gardeners to go peat-free now.

Easter weekend is one of the most popular for the nation to hit garden centres, and there is no better time than the spring to find peat alternatives.

New government figures show that 54% of materials used in soil improvers in UK gardens are now peat free, which is the highest ever percentage in the UK. Usage of materials involving peat has gradually declined over recent years and has dropped by almost 20% in the last decade alone.

But we are worried that many gardeners who have not yet made the switch may still not be aware of the damage they are doing by using peat, and may even think of it as a 'green' product. We want even more people to go peat free this year!

Always look for 'peat free' logos as anything less than that could be having a severe impact on the environment.'

Peat usage destroys rare wildlife habitat. It takes thousands of years to form, at a rate of just one millimetre each year. Its slow growth means that its commercial use is not sustainable and wildlife living in peat bogs could face extinction as the bogs are destroyed.



Birds like snipe, curlew and skylark breed on peat bogs, as well as a variety of butterflies and dragonflies.

Peat supports many species of bog mosses, rare flowering plants such as cranberry, bog myrtle and bog

asphodel, and insectivorous plants like sundews and butterworts.

Extracting peat also exacerbates climate change by releasing carbon dioxide that would otherwise be safely stored in the ground.

Chris Beardshaw, award winning garden designer and TV presenter, says:

"Many gardeners don't realise the damage that peat causes and I'm sure once they do, they will be compelled to use other alternatives.

'You can have beautiful gardens full of flowers, plants and wildlife without damaging the environment.'

"Making your own compost or opting for peat-free products enriches your soil just as well. You can have beautiful gardens full of flowers, plants and wildlife without damaging the environment."

Despite some peat suppliers still not coming clean about the impact of their products on climate change, other retailers are taking steps towards helping eradicate peat usage.

Home improvement retailer B&Q has recently discontinued the sale of 100% peat bales in its stores, a move that the RSPB hopes will encourage other retail outlets to follow suit.

OSPREY'S RETURN



There was great excitement at Loch Garten when the regularly breeding female 'EJ' arrived (complete with fish) on 25th March. This was one day earlier than last year. She was joined on 2nd April by an unringed male (unlike her previous mates) who has been christened Odin. He seems to be very busy doing all the right

things – bringing her fish, helping with the nest building and tidying up, demonstrating how handsome he is (and he is) and, essentially, mating!! A lot! Another male has attempted to woo EJ but Odin's attentions (and food) ensured she ignored this attempted seduction. Let's hope she remains happy with Odin and that she concentrates on rearing her single clutch successfully.

Eggs will surely have been laid by the time you read this.

The visitor centre is open from April 1st until the end of August from 10am – 6pm. But if you can't get there in person and have access to the internet, there is a webcam giving 'live' viewing at <http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/guide//lochgarten/abernethyvideo.asp> also from this site there is access to the diary and other relating bits and pieces.

COACH TRIP TO BROWNSEA ISLAND

I am now taking bookings for our combined coach & ferry trip to Brownsea Island on Sunday 28th June. We will be leaving Exeter bus station at 8.30am, picking up in Honiton at 9.00am and returning to Exeter around 7.00pm. We will be spending about four and a half hours on the island, so there should be plenty of time to view the colony of terns, and look for other birds on the lagoon. There is also a very good chance of seeing wild Red Squirrels. We have arranged an (optional) guided tour of the nature reserve shortly after we arrive. The return ferry trip will take us on a tour around the islands in Poole Harbour.

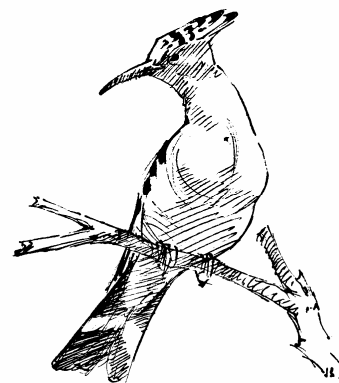
The cost will be £23 per person, for the coach and ferry. There is also a landing fee for non-members of the National Trust, and a small charge for those that visit the nature reserve. Please book your place by sending me your cheque and a stamped addressed envelope before 1st June, so that we can confirm the coach reservation. Please see the

"looking forward" section of this newsletter, or the website, for more details.

Richard Swinbank

NOTES FROM A NON-BIRDER.

- Last year in the apple tree at the bottom of the lawn there was a lot of fussing and two collared doves were repelling magpies from the tree. We watched this with interest but were stunned the following day to find that there was a very rough nest of twigs only a foot above our heads when we were going to and fro gardening – and it contained two very large young ones who made no noise and just observed us working. We wished that we were birders as the pair of young fledged the following day! All of you experts would have noted the progress of the parent doves through the season I am sure!
- Neighbours, three doors away, also had a nest but on their roof and occupied by seagulls. It was in the angle between the chimney and the roof ridge. When the young were growing, they would move to the side of the chimney which allowed them the best use of the sun – my wish for this year is that they do not choose our roof – or indeed any of the near ones as they have turned into major nuisances. Unfortunately the courting noises can be heard regularly
- Great excitement when we visited our son in Toulouse as for several days a pair of hoopoes flew to and fro to a large tree in the garden each evening – why such excitement – we IDENTIFIED the birds!



- In January this year we went to Shapwith Heath Reserve having been informed on the phone that this was the current roost of starlings. At dusk the influx began. We weren't in a hide to view the display close up but had a wide screen view seeing flocks come in from all angles of the sky. It was truly incredible and I think this was the best

introduction for us as we certainly appreciated their flight and the patterns they made. The noise of the wings as they sped by was what I remember also – wonderful!

- Finally, my hope for this year. I have already seen many more sparrows than during the past two years when they have been few and far between. We have an old pyrex dish (10 inches square) which is used as a bird bath and drinking place. The record number of sparrows bathing at one time is currently 12 – can we get up to thirteen this year?! I live in hope!

Happy birding – and I hope some of you will have seen Mastermind on TV yesterday (10 April) when a young man stunned the opposition and won through to the semi-finals with his specialist subject of 'British Birds'. In his conversation with John Humphries before the general questions he stated he was not a birder or twitcher but was completely absorbed by the fascination of birds and bird culture. That's it! Now I know how to explain that I am not a birder!

Ruth Preist

A TRIP TO SOUTHERN SPAIN

Four intrepid members of the Exeter and District Local Group set off at the end of March for a week's birding in Andalucía to catch the early migration. The first shock for your correspondent, never having been before, was how close Africa is at that point. 'I can't believe you can see Africa' became the catch phrase of the week. The birding was terrific. On the first morning from our house high up in Jimena we witnessed

some 100 Griffon Vultures descend on a carcass in the field below, a truly David Attenborough moment. The habitats in the area were varied; however we paid most attention to the coast where the migration was



beginning. We saw lots of raptors and flocks of bee-eaters and managed to get closer views later on. We met up with Pepe who was working for the SEO (Spain's equivalent of the RSPB) on migration

watch and whilst talking to him 6 black kites came through on migration! He was able to give us tips on good birding spots, which we used to great advantage later in the week. One inland wetland site proved very profitable, yielding some 30 different species including Purple Swamp Hen, a Great White Egret, a Short Toed Eagle and a flock of about 30 Spoonbills.

On the last day we visited a site within sight of Malaga Airport, on Pepe's recommendation, and saw White Headed Duck – the only place in the world where they are found we're told.

In total we saw 108 different species, more than 20 your correspondent had not seen before. I can thoroughly recommend a visit to see the migration across the Straits of Gibraltar and to enjoy the spectacular scenery.

Roger Tucker

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.

THE 100 CLUB

Congratulations to the following winners for the last months.

January

£5	88	Mr. M Shepherd
£5	23	Mr & Mrs D Norris
£5	73	Mr J & Mrs M Parker
£5	57	Mr D & Mrs C Murray
£5	63	Mrs J M Evans

February

£60	79	Dr J Burston
£30	70	Mr and Mrs JR Turner
£20	112	Stella Beavan
£15	41	Mrs M and Mr P Moxon
£5	47	Mr and Mrs Partridge
£5	2	Mr and Mrs Houlden
£5	54	Mr R Turner and Ms S Thomson
£5	30	Mr DHW Taylor
£5	29	Mrs H Brothwood

March

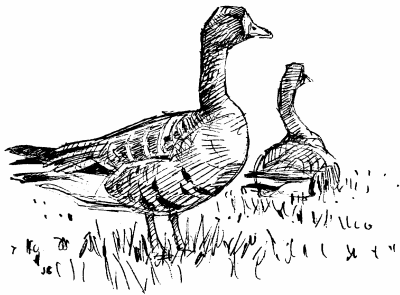
£5	20	Mr J Norton
£5	67	Mrs C Dyer

£5	60	Mrs S Blisset
£5	75	Mr R and Miss S Turner
£5	54	Mrs C Edie

BIRDWATCHING WEEKEND IN NORFOLK

Following the article in the last newsletter, many of you have already booked a place on the birdwatching weekend in Norfolk next January. We

will be staying for four nights (20th -24th January) at the Briarfields Hotel, giving us three full days to explore the area. Briarfields is very close to the RSPB reserve at Titchwell, and is also an ideal base for exploring other



birdwatching sites along the North Norfolk coast.

I still have some double/twin rooms available, costing £228.50 per person. Although the hotel gave us a large allocation of single rooms (at £276 per person), they have now all been booked. If you would like to come, please contact me by the end of June; after that the hotel will not hold our rooms unless a deposit has been paid. My telephone number is 01404 813666 or send me an email to richard.swinbank@mac.com.

Richard Swinbank

BLACK HOLE MARSH

An additional morning field trip has been arranged to visit Black Hole Marsh on Sunday 18th October. Black Hole Marsh is a new reserve in the Axe Valley, recently purchased by East Devon District Council, which is not yet open to the public. The EDDC Countryside Service has established a saline lagoon there to attract waders and ducks, and they plan to construct a new hide. We will also visit the neighbouring Colyford Common reserve. Meeting arrangements will be confirmed later, and will be published in the next newsletter and on the website.

Richard Swinbank

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.

RESERVE NEWS

EXE ESTUARY

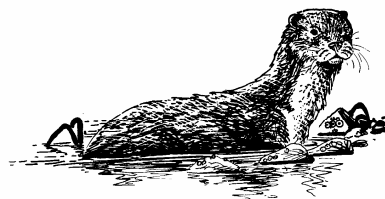
Record Breaking Avocets and Tobogganing Otters!

Well the winter on the marshes has been different of late. Firstly, we must say a farewell to Malcolm Davies. His tireless enthusiasm and knowledge for the marshes, the estuary and of the Society's work will be missed.

Autumn management work was again hampered by another wet summer, but some crucial water levels management work was achieved and has proved invaluable as we now appear to be having an exceptionally dry spring.

A huge thank you to the volunteer winter wildfowl count team, the data has been crunched and shows that teal had a record year reaching over 1000 birds on site. Goosemoor proved to be a real lifeline for them during the early January big freeze when nearly 600 birds found feeding still possible in the developing salt marsh. Wigeon numbers were slightly down but wader numbers held their own with increased counts for black-tailed godwits and a reserve record breaking count of avocet with 633 on Bowling Green Marsh alone. If you haven't been to see these birds roosting on the high tide at Bowling Green Marsh you really are missing a treat. Avocet numbers peak in mid January but they are on site from November to March.

Our winter rarity highlight would have to be a bittern which stayed on site for over two weeks. Only a hand full of lucky observers caught a glimpse of this elusive bird. It's great to think this may have been one of the successfully breeding birds from the RSPB reserve at ham wall.



Snow fall on the marshes this year gave us a real insight to otter use in the area. Early morning tracks allowed us to follow an animal from Topsham lock

cottage north to under the motorway. This animal periodically dropped in to the canal to feed. While

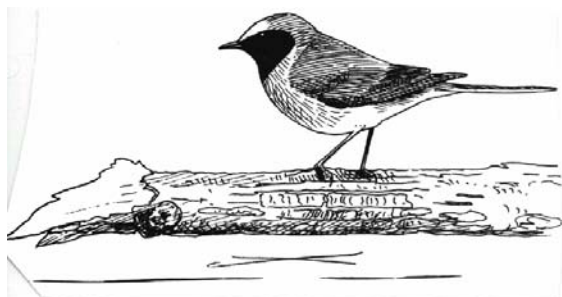
on another day tracks were picked up just south of bridge road on the cycle track and with some detective work it was found that they were running up the bank from the west and then sliding on their bellies across the cycle path and strait into the canal! To stand any chance of seeing these magical creatures it helps to be up early. A chilly 6am in April was my last sighting but that story will have to wait for another day!

Breeding bird surveys are now underway and the fingers are firmly crossed for a productive year on the marshes. Several osprey have already been seen heading north and warblers are flooding in to the reed beds. Lapwing are sitting on eggs and redshanks are just starting to display. It's hard to beat a wetland in springtime.

WINTERBOURNE DOWNS

Annual Review

Bird news



A redstart was the star of the spring passage 2008, with 15 pairs of lapwing settling down in early summer. The extra areas of fallow habitat provided attracted further stone-curlews - one pair nested twice and produced one chick, and three other stone-curlews were present. A corn bunting held territory in an area of chalk grassland. Hobby sightings continued until October. A red kite has continued to be seen through the winter, with visiting stonechats bobbing along the fence wires, a Merlin and the occasional raven. The rise of the River Bourne in the New Year has brought in snipe, lapwings and teal with mallard. We would be very pleased to hear from you with your wildlife records for the reserve.

Green energy

The hard work and enthusiasm of a growing band of volunteers has enabled us to carry out butterfly transects, breeding bird surveys, estate maintenance, and wildlife data management. As a result 20 butterfly species and 81 birds were recorded in 2008. A variety of bird and bat boxes have been put up too, including barn owl boxes from the Hawk Conservancy as part of their fund-a-bird project. For more information on volunteering, even if it is only the occasional hour or so, please contact Patrick at the reserve office (tel. 01980 629845).

Wildlife friendly farming

Manor Farm is the operational hub of the reserve, and as ever in 2008, operations were at the mercy of the elements. The prolonged summer wet weather led to a late and intermittent harvest, and although the crops were harvested in good condition, we missed the window to sow oilseed rape. On the positive side, this meant more winter stubble for wintering flocks of finches, and more ground nesting opportunities for skylarks and lapwings in the spring-sown barley that took its place. The wet weather was good for growing grass and sheep, with our thousand plus ewes, lambs and ewe lambs all in good form. The wet weather was great for slugs, who decimated the stubble turnips before they got established, reducing the amount of winter feed for our sheep. We are now looking forward to our next crop of lambs this Easter.

More wildlife-friendly measures have been put in place around the farm, including unfertilised and unsprayed field edges, and wild bird seed mixtures. Grass strips alongside the seed mixtures in open situations will help provide food and nesting cover for birds such as corn buntings and grey partridges. Old field systems and ring ditches also are being better preserved by taking fields out of cultivation as they are reverted to chalk grassland.

Chalk grassland creation

The first year chalk grasslands were a blaze of poppies, even after three topplings to remove flower heads of unwanted arable annual plants. The second year grasslands buzzed with insect life on still days, and our butterfly transects recorded small blue, common blue, meadow brown, marbled white, dark green fritillary and small skipper butterflies. Problem arable annuals, such as black grass and wild oat, have virtually gone from the year two swards, with a notable increase in perennial wildflowers - chalk wildflowers such as clustered bellflower are more widespread and new species such as autumn gentian are appearing. In September 2008, a further 25 ha of flower-rich chalk grassland was sown, bringing the total in reversion to 103 ha.



Clustered Bellflower

Nature trails opening for Easter

Exciting news! We have been working hard on establishing the new nature trails, and should have

them completed in time for the spring show of cowslips in the new wildflower meadow by the car park.

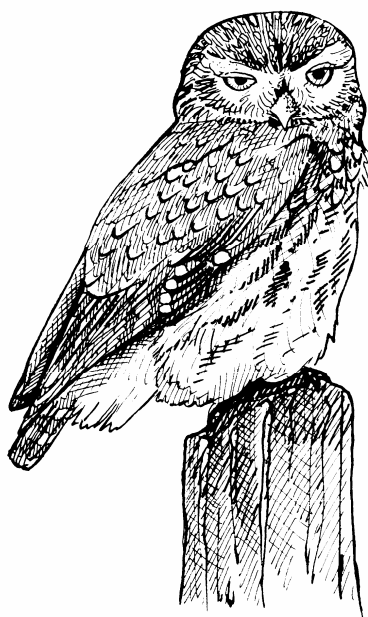
So that as many people as possible can experience the wildflowers and insects of the new chalk grassland, we have made a short experimental access track to take wheelchairs, and pushchairs, into the meadow from the car park. We are seeking comments from the local access forum on this path,

and would especially welcome feedback from local users, and indeed on your wider experiences on the new trails, even if it is just to report the first cuckoo of 2009.

Patrick Cashman
Site Manager
Wiltshire Reserves

LOOKING BACK

13th January 2009
"The Complete Owl" Michael Leach



The hall in Exeter was full for the talk by Michael Leach on "The Complete Owl".

He not only showed beautiful photographs, but gave a very witty commentary as well keeping the audience riveted, and making the whole evening most enjoyable for all.

He has given talks in over 50 countries, and where-ever he goes, he says everyone loves owls they are the most popular bird on earth!

He is well known for his photography, and has written 27 books containing some of his stunning wildlife photographs, and these books have been translated into 11 different languages.

He had always wanted to be an explorer and wildlife photographer; and after leaving university eventually got a job working for the BBC as a wildlife cameraman. He worked with Sir David Attenborough, amongst others, and a typical half hour film would take over a year to put together working seven days a week, twenty four hours a day!

He told a lovely story about making a film called "24 hours of a motorway"; of how he baited the hard shoulder with a dead rabbit (bought from a butcher) hoping birds would come and feed off it, only to have it taken three days running by a young fox that thought it had found a fast food takeaway!

He went on to work as a freelance cameraman working for both the BBC and other independent broadcasters.

He has been a full time wildlife photographer and author since 1977, and is now one of Europe's top

professionals, with his photographs appearing in over 800 books.

His slide show showed some of the 136 species of owl that there are in the world, and he has spent two and a half years searching the world for them all, and has now written an illustrated book about his adventures.

Owls are not as intelligent as we all believe; it was a myth that started in Greece, and most of their head is taken up by eye sockets, not brain. The closest relative to the owl is the Nightjar.

Everyone also thinks that owls only ever come out at night and hunt, but this is not so; 47 species of owl forage during daylight hours.

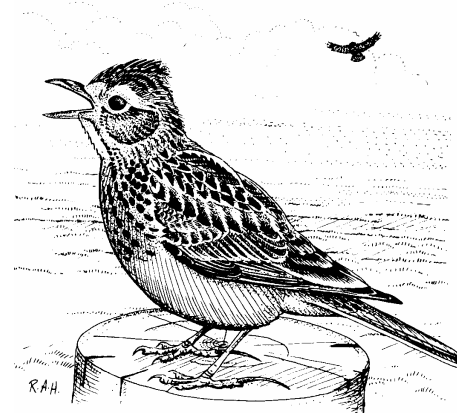
Although many species of owl are becoming rarer in some countries; such as the Barn Owl in Great Britain; this is not the case worldwide and Barn Owls flourish in Europe.

Michael Leach was a delight to listen to, and his photographs were stunning,. No doubt his other twelve or so illustrated talks about his travels across the world and wildlife encounters are just as enjoyable.

Lindsay Clitherow

Stear Point,
Saturday 17th January

Our group met at the car park on the foreshore for a quick look out to sea. Sky Larks were up and singing. High tide was due about 11.30 am. It was a frosty, but sunny, morning with a slight breeze blowing. After a short period we moved on to the main car park about a mile down the road and met with the remainder of our group consisting of 20 or so members.



A short walk to the foreshore was interrupted by a return back along the path on the discovery of a Little Owl well camouflaged and tucked in under a barn roof. The walk along the foreshore to the saltings and hide was bounded by reed beds down to the sea on one side and open fields on the other. With the sun behind us, many hundreds of waders wheeled and turned in the sky above the reeds giving a spectacular display. Knot, Dunlin, Curlew and others flew up and down the seashore.

A trip up the tower hide gave good views of the land around. A Peregrine was perched upon a low post, while meadow and water pipits were feeding within yards of this predator. Lots of Redshanks were feeding in the pools around and one particular Redshank caused much debate. After a while we decided this was a Spotted Redshank, and very nice too! A walk around some of the hides on the salt marsh produced a few Wigeon and a Reed Bunting. By now the sun had gone and the wind was strengthening. While taking lunch in one of the hides I was lucky enough to watch a Peregrine drop out of the sky onto an unsuspecting Redshank. The Peregrine flew off with the unlucky Redshank calling from beneath.

The return produced Redwings and Fieldfares, showing well on a fence a few yards in front of us; Long tailed Tits, Finches and a Kestrel sitting on various chimney pots. In the distance many hundreds of Lapwing took to the sky.

We took a short drive to Stolford beach. A walk along the sea wall produced 20+ Pintail, a Heron, Curlew and some Ringed Plovers. Further out to sea towards Hinkley Point three rafts of Common Scoters showed well, numbering 50 or more in just one group.

On return to our cars a small intrepid group carried on to Greylake while the rest of us decided to call it a day. And a good day too!

Lyndon Savage

West Sedgemoor

7 Feb

Cancelled due to snow

Bowling Green Marsh,

20th February

A group of eight – rising to nine later in the morning – met in the Holman Way car park on a grey morning. As we set off several of us automatically started to turn left to go to the hide first, but for a change we turned right and went down to the estuary. Having volunteered to keep the record of the day's sightings I was kept busy noting what others had seen (House Sparrow; Starling; various tits) but, confession over early, I cannot say I saw



every bird the group noticed.

The tide was out, the lowest I've ever seen it, but there were waders and wintering ducks nonetheless. One of the first glories of the day was Goldeneye; then Red-breasted Merganser. Flitting through the trees along the Strand was a family of Long-tailed Tits. Shelduck showed up brightly from the Goat Walk. From the viewing platform there were close up views of Avocet and in the distance a Great Spotted Woodpecker was heard drumming. Try as we might, we could not see him.

The hide was packed with families with youngsters on half-term enjoying the birds – the Black-tailed Godwit, Teal and Wigeon and Pintail and Snipe for those with sharp eyes.

In all, a varied morning with a pleasing total of 51 species seen and some spring song heard.

Jan Croysdale

Otter Estuary 8th March 2009

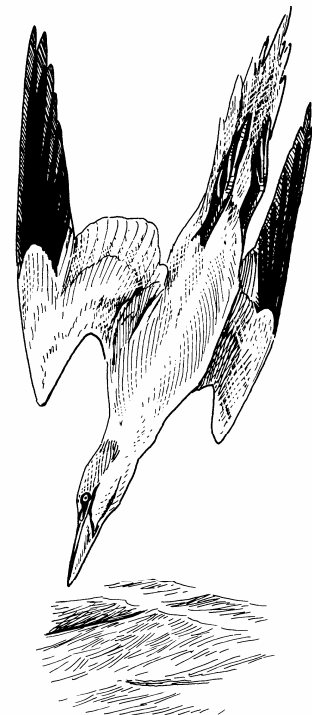
We met at Lime Kiln car park at 9 a.m. A strong Westerly was blowing, but with a completely blue sky. A quick look from the end of the pebble bar revealed a few Gannets in the distance fishing and a small raft of Common Scoters.

Looking up the estuary a small company of Wigeon were noisily feeding nearby, in full plumage with their orange crests glowing in the sunshine.

First stop at the platform along the path to Otterton produced many Herring Gulls, a few Common and a brief glimpse of a Mediterranean Gull, but no sighting of a much talked about American Herring Gull. I later found out that he doesn't show till after 2pm! Most inconsiderate!

I suspect a strong wind was keeping many birds skulking low in the reed beds. Past the road bridge a pair of Kestrels gave us a good display above us, again fighting the wind. Along this path there are two large rookeries and I am always amused by their constant chattering and industrious activity.

“And, see yon Rooks how odd their flight,
They imitate the gliding Kite,
And seem precipitate to fall,
As if they felt the piercing ball-
'Twill surely rain - I see with sorrow
Our Jaunt must be put off to-morrow”



Well, our jaunt continued but with clouds thickening. Scanning the fields 6 egrets showed well feeding close to the hedge, three of which were Cattle Egrets, a lovely surprise, their yellow beaks and shorter posture comparing well with their cousins. A few Teal kept low in the ditches along with a few Herons.

Crossing over the second bridge to return home saw the rooks' behaviour turn true. The heavens opened, the temperature dropped and the wind blew for much of our return. For my part, I was in a hurry to return to the car and the return was disappointing apart from a small herd of six Curlew and possibly a Whimbrel.

(Collective nouns -Charles Louis Hett, 1898)

Lyndon Savage

**Wembury,
Saturday 21st March**

A good crowd of us met at Wembury beach car park. We were greeted by full sun and a cold westerly breeze that remained throughout the day. We followed the coastal path west to Wembury Point where HMS Cambridge once was, but mostly the land has been turned over to the National Trust. The high ground, covered in blackthorn and low scrub, slopes down to arable fields and finally to an elevated rocky shoreline. The Great Mew Stone stands out to sea about one kilometre off shore.

Raptors showed well above the path; a Peregrine for starters, a Kestrel in the trees on the slopes, a Buzzard above and further along a Sparrowhawk brushed against my trousers about a foot above the ground along a narrow path amongst the scrub. That was a shock! Lots of Dunnock everywhere, a few Long-tailed Tits but no sight of any migrants. An oil beetle was showed itself well on the path. This creature has a black shell with an iridescent blue covering.

At sea a Great Northern Diver showed well for all, and further out Shags, gulls and Cormorants were feeding on the water around the Mew Stone. Further along I caught up with the tail end of our party looking eagerly down at a small cove. To my great surprise a Black Redstart was flitting from rock

to rock feeding on insects. A black bird with a red tail and a rare visitor to our shores, this was a lovely bonus and a first for me. The return over the top of Wembury Point revealed coltsfoot in flower and a few



stinking iris plants.

Lunch at the car park was followed by a trip eastwards along the coast to the Old Coastguard where we witnessed a Raven doing acrobatics in the sky whilst being chased by a mob of Jackdaws. Two peregrines sat quietly on the rocks below us. The views from here a truly quite beautiful.

A short haul up the hill to Wembury House showed a few woodland birds, in particular a Great Tit examining a hole in a large tree. Further along on the edge of Wembury by a nearby farm revealed the final surprise of the day. Some 20 or so Yellowhammers were feeding on spilt corn. Among them there were 2 Cirl Buntings. A really good finish to the day!

Lyndon Savage



Female Yellowhammer



Female Corn Bunting

GROUP CONTACTS

Leader Roger Tucker 01392 860518
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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 2nd May South Milton and Bolt Tail

A walk to see seabirds and migrants, taking in South Milton Ley and South Huish water meadows. Later on, the more energetic can walk around the headland at Bolt Tail.

Meet 8.30 am Clyst St Mary or 10.00am at National Trust car park, South Milton Sands SX677414
Car park charge. Toilets and cafe adjacent.
Bring and carry packed lunch

Saturday 9th May 2009 Spring Fayre and Plant Sale

St Margaret's Church, Topsham. 10am - 12 noon.
Donations very welcome, if unable to bring on the day please contact Val Palmer tel 01392 271791 or Pam Hancock tel 01884 839987.

Sunday 17th May Venford

It's several years since our last visit to Venford. We will be looking for birds on both the moorland and in the woods above the upper Dart valley. Weather permitting, we will have our lunch on Bench Tor before returning to our cars in early afternoon.

Meet at Clyst St Mary at 8.30 am, or north car park by the dam at Venford Reservoir (SX686712) at 9.30am.

Bring and carry packed lunch.
Toilets by car park.

Tuesday 2nd June Steps Bridge and Dunsford Woods

Morning field trip to look for woodland and riverside birds along the Teign Valley. We hope to see Pied Flycatchers, Wood Warblers, and perhaps we'll be lucky again with the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

Meet at Steps Bridge car park (SX802882) at 10.00am.
No toilets

Saturday 13th June Shapwick Heath and Westhay

In the morning we will look for water birds, warblers, and (hopefully) Hobbies at Shapwick Heath. In the

afternoon we will move on to the nearby reserve at Westhay.

Meet 8.30 am at Clyst St Mary car park (SX972911), or Ashcott Corner (ST448396) at 9.45 am. Bring packed lunch.

No toilets.

Sunday 28th June Brownsea Island

An all-day coach and ferry trip to Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, especially noted for its tern colony and red squirrels. Bring packed lunch, or eat at the cafe.

Depart Exeter bus station 8.30 am, Honiton 9.00 am. Return to Exeter about 7.00 pm.

Cost: £23 for coach and ferry journey. There will also be a landing fee (£4.40) for non-members of the National Trust. If you wish to visit the nature reserve, there is an additional charge of about £2 for non-members of the Dorset Wildlife Trust.

Must be pre-booked; 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 people & whether you are NT members; where you will board the coach; full telephone number (in case of queries, or emergencies); cheque to cover coach and ferry costs, 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, by 1st June.

Tuesday 14th July Mutters Moor

A change of venue for this year's summer evening walk to look for Nightjars.

Meet at the car park at the top of Peak Hill, Sidmouth (SX109872) at 9.00 pm.

No toilets.

Thursday 30th July Dawlish Warren

A summertime visit to Dawlish Warren should give us good views of terns as well as waders.

Meet in car park (north end, near nature reserve, SX981786) at 10.00 am.

Car park charge. Toilets near car park.