



Hello everyone. Enjoying the summer? It seems that wellies, not sunblock is the order of the day! Hopefully, it's not stopped you getting out and about or ruined your holidays. It may be our summer recess, but we're still as active as ever.

With this latest edition of the newsletter, you'll also find enclosed your membership renewal form. Thank you for supporting us and we look forward to seeing you all again soon.

New Zealand Calling

A message from Gary Abel, from the opposite side of the world.

"I have not had a chance to do much bird watching just yet, but I have been on two trips to locations which are 10 minutes from my house. They both consist of a wetland conservation area that joins the sea, similar to Titchwell.

Bird watching is not a big pastime here like it is in the UK. At the moment I have been unable to find any bird watching clubs or groups and have only met one person who bird watches. He does this whilst on holiday in Australia. However he doesn't bother in NZ due to the lack of variety of birds.

In terms of birds, the Black-backed Gull is the most common of the gulls by far. In fact, there are only three different gulls here, so that part of my bird ID has been solved!

The other bird that is very common is the Australasian Harrier. I quite often see around 6 to 12 on my way to work, which is only a 30 km trip.

Here is a photo that I took of a Spur Winged Plover. This was taken on the front lawn of my house which is in the suburbs!! "



Random Jottings...

So I have a confession to make – I lied! Well, actually, my predictions were awry. But that's bird watching for you, isn't it? You never know what's going to happen, or what you're likely to see. Those birdies like to keep you on your toes, don't they?

In April's newsletter I mentioned what happened last year in my garden. This year, the Bullfinches are daily (so they must be nesting nearby), no Willow Warblers have appeared and I've now got 15 House Sparrows (they even wait on the fence for the bread to be thrown out at 7.45 every morning!)

Mrs Mallard made a habit of visiting in the evening for some bread and seed (you've never seen a duck run so fast down the garden when I opened the back door) and always had a bathe and preen in the pond. But she's not been seen since the end of May, so do I predict (I should know better by now) that she's raising her young somewhere. Will she and her offspring be visiting in a few weeks time?

The Robins have raised 3 broods from the same nest, but there's only one adult now. It was inspiring to watch their dedication and relentless efforts going back and forth with food for their chicks. There's also plenty of successfully fledged youngsters around, including a Greater Spotted Woodpecker (red on the top of the head).

But there's been a lot more happening since last summer, hasn't there? Two years ago, we were sitting in a classroom on winter evenings learning about birds with Barry. Eighteen months ago, it seemed that our bird watching would never be the same again as Barry announced his retirement. What were we going to do? How would we learn about birds in such a social and relaxed way?

Well, inspired by everyone's comments and wishes, it's a year since we started SLB and it's success has been beyond all expectations. Field trips, evening walks, a weekend away, guest speakers at meetings (all excellent quality), plus much more. Some might say that it's been down to the work that's been put in by the committee, but it's really down to the membership. That's you, the people who participate, who enjoy bird watching and encourage others to join in.

And that's what makes it all special and rewarding. So here's to the next year - there's so much in the pipeline and we're getting a little more adventurous! See you all in September.

Dennis Taylor

Indoor Meetings

Our forthcoming program of indoor meetings, with guest speakers, will be:

September 12th 2007 - "Bird Migration"

An illustrated talk by Peter Holden of the RSPB.

October 10th 2007 - Annual General Meeting / Member's Evening

November 14th 2007 - "British Birds of Prey"

An audio visual show by Nick Williams

December 12th 2007 - Christmas Dinner

To be held at The Manor, Glen Parva. Booking details TBA.

January 9th 2008 - "Little Brown Jobs"

A talk by Jeff Baker of the BTO

Doors are open from 7.00pm, meetings start at 7.30pm, finishing at approx. 9.30pm.

Please attend early, especially at the September meeting, if you wish to renew your membership, book trips or order seed etc..

Committee Vacancy

A vacancy has arisen on the committee. Martin Williamson has decided to stand down from his position, although he will still be active in a supporting role.

So we are looking for a successor. The main duty will be to organise and liaise with guest speakers for our indoor meetings.

If you are interested in taking up the role, please discuss further with a committee member. All prospective candidates will be nominated for election at the Annual General Meeting.

A Trip to Goa

I went with a group of keen birdwatchers (RSPB members) to Goa, which is a state in South East India, between the 21st January and 5th February 2007. The weather in Goa was very hot - some days it got to 100° - too much for me walking in the heat so tried to keep in the shade after noon. We had to get up early in order to see the best birds and the mornings were very pleasant. The day after we arrived most of the group went to the Goan Theme Evening, where we saw lots of ladies and gentleman in Indian dress. There was a band, ladies dancing with lamps, men juggling with fire sticks and a super barbecue.

We had two days birding locally before going to Backwoods Camp about 1½ hours drive away. Some of the group went to Baga Fields, Wood and Beach but it was too far for me. So Angela and I birded over the saltpans across from the hotel. There were quite a few sightings there, including Stork Billed and White-throated Kingfisher, Great White and Little Egret and Indian Pond Heron. The group took taxis to the Beira Mar Hotel (this is the way to travel in Goa), which is a well-known birdwatching spot, and were served delicious fresh strawberry milkshakes! There were great views of Green and Blue tailed Bee-eaters, 3 out of 4 Mynas, Scaly and Black-headed Munia and a very dark (it was dusk) Greater Painted Snipe.

I went with most of the group camping to Backwoods Camp but no, you didn't have to put your own tent up! It was very civilised with large twin bedded tents spread around a forest. You even had a flush toilet, wash basin and shower and your own tree frog, if you were lucky. Of all the birds, which included Rufous-bellied Hawk Eagle, Black Eagle and Crested Serpent Eagle, Pompadour Green Pigeon, Vernal Hanging Parrot, Indian Pitta (an early riser), my favourite were the pair of Sri Lankan Frogmouths we saw asleep in a tree (they are part of the Nightjar family).

The day after we returned from camp, most of the group went on a morning boat trip. We saw five different Kingfishers but there was no sign of any crocodiles, although we did look. We also got breakfast on the boats - hot pasties and a bottle of Coke, they love Coca Cola in Goa. On Sunday, 28th Jan, we set out with our guide, Lloyd. He took to a fantastic place - Carambolin Lake. We saw so many birds there including Lesser Adjutant, Lesser Whistling Duck, Slaty Breasted Rail, 3 Prinias and Wild Boar.

A few of us took a couple of days off and went into Old Goa and saw St Francis of Assisi Church and the Cathedral and a Spice Plantation, which was quite an experience. In fact, we had the best view all holiday of a Crimson backed Sunbird, it perched in a tree 2 feet away from us, too close for photos!

Lloyd took us to great places and we saw many fantastic birds - I think my favourite must be the Malabar Trojan, the incredible colours of the male are never to be forgotten (he even has his photo on the front of the field guide!). We were invited back to Lloyd's house on Friday and met his family which for me, made a very pleasant near-end to the holiday. We did have some ups and downs, Betty, had a fall in Backwoods and was laid up for the second week, All Spice was our favourite restaurant and I loved the cocktails, hic! Just in case you're wondering, the group saw 237 birds. I'm sure I didn't see half of those, but mine were very memorable.

Rita Yeomans

Name That Bird



Two LBJ's for you to identify. One from your back garden and one a little less common. Answers in the next newsletter.

Thanks to Graham Turner for providing the pictures.

An Hour at RSPB Freiston Shore nr Boston, Lincolnshire

A site best visited during the winter months for good numbers of over wintering waterfowl and a decent selection of waders. The only facilities here are a car park and two hides, the nearest toilets being in Boston, five miles away. Wrap up warm; this is one of the most exposed bird watching sites in England. When the wind blows off The Wash there is only you to stop it!

Of the two bird hides on site; the first gives good views across the lagoon. From here you should be able to see Plovers, Oystercatcher, Redshank etc. It's a good site for Bar Tailed and Black Tailed Godwits and there were plenty around on the day I visited. You can also expect good numbers of Knot and Dunlin. From this hide I also had Teal, Pintail, Wigeon and Tufted Duck.

Once you have left the hide you will soon be walking along the sea bank, with good views across the saltmarsh. Here there were hundreds of Brent Geese feeding and a couple of Curlew. I also had distant views of a Peregrine Falcon.

This is also a good site for Tree Sparrow and one popped up on top of a hawthorn near the main car park.

On a previous visit here I have seen a small flock of Snow Bunting, so keep your eyes peeled for these and possible Twite. I have never yet made it to the second hide; it appears to be quite a distance from the main car park. So when visiting here allow yourself 3 or 4 hours to cover the reserve.

RSPB Freiston Shore is easily found, head through Boston on the A52 following the signs for A52 Skegness. After about 4 miles the reserve is signposted off the main road to the right. If you have time RSPB Frampton Marsh reserve is just South of Boston.

Paul Seaton

Three Counties Weekend Away 2008

The dates for next weekend away will be the 9th, 10th & 11th May, 2008. We will be based in Stowmarket, Suffolk. On the 9th we will visit reserves in Essex, on the 10th Suffolk and the 11th Norfolk. Please make a note for your diary. Bookings will be accepted at the next indoor meeting in September (*not before!*) when full details will be available. A deposit of £55.00 per person will be required.

Field Trips - Winter Program

15th September 2007 - Blithfield Reservoir, Abbots Bromley, Staffs

After our successful trip to Sandwell Valley last year, we again head off to the West Midlands. Blithfield is a 800 acre drinking water supply reservoir, situated to the west of Abbots Bromley in Staffordshire. It is operated by South Staffordshire Water, who have granted a lease to the West Midland Bird Club for the issue of permits for the purpose of observing and recording birds. Cost £3.00 includes permit for the day. Start 7.30am.

13th October 2007 - NWT Cley Marshes, Norfolk

Perched on the north Norfolk coast, Cley has a well deserved reputation as one of the UK's premier bird watching sites and there's always something to see whatever time of year you visit. The pools and scrapes are all within easy view of the hides. A new visitor centre (currently being built) will hopefully be completed before our visit .Cost £5.50 includes permit for the day. Norfolk Wildlife Trust members free entry so just £2.00 per head - bring your card! Start 7.30am.

17th November 2007 - WWT Martin Mere, Lancashire

The home of Bill Oddie's Autumn Watch, he will have departed by the time we arrive but the swans and geese hopefully will still be there. A good chance to see Bewick and Whooper Swans, something we seldom have the opportunity of in the Midlands. There is, of course, the captive wildfowl collection to observe.

This trip is by coach at a cost of £16.00 per person, plus £6.00 for entry.

Please note that the bus leaves at 7.00am prompt!

15th December 2007 - Pitsford Reservoir, Brixworth, Northamptonshire

Pitsford Water is an SSSI known for it's prolific wildlife especially it's breeding birds and winter wildfowl. The reserve is managed in partnership with the Wildlife Trust. The wide range of habitats also includes woodland, scrub, grassland. Cost is £3.00 per person includes permit for the day. 7.30am start.

27th December 2007 - Hollowell and Ravensthorpe Reservoirs, Northants

A break from all the Christmas excess and a chance to walk off some of those extra pounds gained. Two local Anglian water reservoirs which are often overlooked but both can provide a good few hours bird watching. Cost is £2.00 per person includes permit for the day. 8.30am start

Bookings, along with payment please, by 20th August to Paul Seaton.

All trips leave from Blaby Scout Centre, at the times shown.

Welsh Weekend May 11th/12th/13th 2007

Our first weekend away as a group started well with everyone arriving safely at Dobbie's Garden Centre, Shrewsbury and all within a few minutes of each other. An excellent hot breakfast at a reasonable price is always a good start to any day. We then set off for our first reserve of the weekend, Lake Vyrnwy.

RSPB Lake Vyrnwy

On arrival there were good views of Siskin on the feeders, including some of this year's young. Roger was our guide around the reserve and he gave us some history about the location and showed us good viewing points across the lake. He did seem in rather a hurry at times, but at least I didn't have to worry about map reading. We had good views of Willow Warbler, Mistle and Song Thrush, Goldcrest, Linnet and Buzzard. Everyone eventually made it up Cardiac Hill without expiring!!! Lunch was taken in the hide overlooking the woodland and again excellent views of Siskin, so close you could reach out and touch them if it wasn't for the glass-fronted hide. Close up views of Marsh Tit and Great Spotted Woodpecker, and a Sparrowhawk flashed through looking for it's dinner, as we ate ours.

The afternoon saw the rain arrive but not quite the deluge forecast. We set off for a wander round the sculpture park, which soon resulted in good views of Grey Wagtail and Treecreeper. From the top of the dam we again saw Grey Wagtail, along with Jackdaw, Swift, House Martin and Swallow. Earlier, on this walk a few people had Dipper, but from the top of the dam they were a little more obvious flying too and from their nest at the sewerage inlet. Not a big list for the day but some good views, especially the Siskin.

Hafod Hotel 7.00a.m Saturday

For those able to stagger out of bed on a Saturday at 7.00a.m the rewards are on the doorstep. The birdwatching around the hotel is always good and this morning was no exception. Excellent views of Spotted Flycatcher, Nuthatch and eventually after a lot of searching, Wood Warbler. Great Spotted Woodpeckers were in and out of their nest. Again we saw Grey Wagtail and had good views of Blackcap near the falls. Several Red Kites circled overhead during the morning's walk and all that before breakfast!

Our destination for the day was Ynis Hir RSPB Reserve.

RSPB Ynis Hir

Yet another beautifully picturesque nature reserve and again the Siskins were there waiting for us at the feeding station. We guided ourselves around this reserve splitting into two groups. In the morning my group headed towards the Estuary and John's through the woodland. All of us were on the lookout for Pied Flycatcher and Redstart. My first Pied Flycatchers turned into a young family of Long Tailed Tits, very black and white and freshly fledged. Just outside the first hide on the estuary turned out to be a little hotspot of bird activity. We had male and female Stonechats on the gate and fence posts and Reed Bunting as well. There was also Meadow Pipit close by on the scrub. Close to the estuary there was a female Wheatear on the grass and Gulls on the estuary, whilst a Cormorant flew along the water. Dave spotted a Little Egret flying in.

Eventually we made it into the hide and had good views of Curlew, Common Sandpiper, Redshank and Grey Heron. Moving on to the next hide gave us excellent views of a singing Sedge Warbler. There were several Oystercatchers about and more Curlew. But for me one of the best birds of the weekend was the Whimbrel we saw from this hide, mainly because I actually managed to identify it!! (and it was confirmed by John's group later in the day). Back to the centre for a packed lunch and the alternative route for the afternoon walk. John's group on their woodland walk had discovered two young Tawny Owls, thanks to eagle eyed Shirley. Marion kindly marked the spot for my group to find and we duly did. We must have spent at least half an hour observing these young owls and many photos were taken (see page 11 - they were very cute and cuddly). One of the adult Tawnies was seen briefly before flying off. Pied Flycatcher, Cuckoo (heard only), Sand Martin, Black Tailed Godwit, Lapwing and Raven were among the rest of the day's highlights. A very good day out, with an excellent variety of birds and amazingly good weather. But still no Redstarts....

Hafod Hotel 7.00a.m Sunday

Not as many birds about as the previous day, but still we had good views of Spotted Flycatcher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and Siskin again. Wood Warbler was only heard this time. Then towards the top of an Oak tree Marion found the elusive Redstart - a male - but it wasn't hanging around and was off before most of us could focus on it. Jane H had a male Pied Flycatcher outside the front of the hotel.

Radnorshire Wildlife Trust's Gilfach Farm

Our first site for today, Gilfach, at 1000ft above sea level surely one of the highest nature reserves in Britain. For me, this place has left a lasting impression of stunning views and beautiful walks and of course the kind attention of Pip and Viv Amos, the reserve wardens. Pip immediately showed us some of the treasures of the reserve, first up was a pair of ground nesting Coal Tits using a former anthill and more recently used by nesting mice. Then we had the close up views of a Tree creeper nest at the base of an Oak tree with the parents busily going to and fro. Behind them was a nest box with Pied Flycatchers going in and out, probably the best views of the weekend.

After much searching a male Redstart was eventually tracked down in an ugly Oak tree (looked like it belonged in a Harry Potter film). Good views were had by some, but it was not hanging around. Pip then took us down to the river in search of Dipper and Grey Wagtail, by now we were getting pretty wet, as the heavens had opened up fully. We did see the Dipper nest yet no sign of the birds, but again had views of Grey Wagtail. We made our way back to the visitor centre where Viv was ready with hot tea and coffee and homemade cake - very welcome after receiving a good soaking outdoors. For those who did not hear Pip talking, Gilfach will be appearing on Chris Packham's 'Nature's Calendar' in the near future as the place to see Dipper (it may already have been aired on TV by the time you read this). After lunch we headed for Gigrin Farm.

Gigrin Farm Red Kite Feeding Centre, Rhayder

We all had a wander round the visitor centre and shop before heading to the hides to watch the kites being fed. It was nice to be in the dry, as the rain was relentless by now. The weather kept the quantity of Kites down but the views were still of a very good quality. We also had excellent views of Ravens, most of which were on the fence posts prior to feeding. A cheeky Grey Heron joined in the feeding session and a Buzzard landed in front of us and stayed for a good while. There were also good views of another male Redstart below the oak trees, for those who managed to get on it in time.

Overall, a good weekend, with a total of 84 different birds seen. If you enjoyed this one, hopefully we will see you on the Norfolk/Suffolk weekend in May 2008.

Paul Seaton



A young Welsh Tawny Owl.
All cute & cuddly!

Photo by
John Palmer

Evening Walks

Our short programme of evening walks at local sites have been enjoyable. Thanks to all who came along and it was wonderful to have Dan Roselli out and about again with us.

Crow Mills Evening Walk - 23rd May 2007

Thirteen of us enjoyed a beautiful spring evening walk, in lovely evening sunshine. Special thanks go to SLB member Jo Ball, who kindly allowed us a walk round her land on Mill Lane. This part of the walk gave us excellent close up views of a very busy Little Owl. Refreshments at the end of the walk were very welcome - once again thanks to Jo. The money collected on this evening walk was donated to a charity selected by Jo Ball.

Lucas Marsh/Brocks Hill Evening Walk – 11th July 2007

After all the rain and poor weather, we had a fine evening to walk and explore. Every other bird seemed to be a Wood Pigeon, but we had many good sightings of our target bird, the Yellowhammer. Swifts, Long Tailed Tits, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Chiffchaff were also seen. Blackcap was heard several times, but stayed out of sight!

Field Trip Sightings

A quick recap on the highlights of our recent field trips.

14th April 2007 - Holme Dunes (57 species)

A foggy day, but some good sightings. Ring Ouzel, Wheatear, Short Eared Owl (for some!), Barn Owl, Ruff, Black Tailed Godwit, Fieldfare, Stonechat, Sedge Warbler, Willow Warbler and Linnet.

2nd June 2007 - Roydon Common & Flitcham Abbey (52 species)

One of our few 'summer' days - hot and sunny! Amongst the birds seen were: Egyptian Goose, Marsh Harrier, Red Legged and Grey Partridge, Curlew, Little Owl, Tree Pipit, Stonechat, Spotted Flycatcher, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting.

16th June 2007 - Eyebrook (62 species)

A morning spent at the reservoir gave us several good birds: Osprey, Red Kite, Kestrel, Red Legged & Grey Partridge, Yellowhammer, Tree Sparrow, Barn Owl, Common Tern, Dunlin, Bullfinch, several warblers and a wonderful Grey Plover in summer plumage.

In the afternoon we moved on to Rectory Farm, the home of Eyebrook Bird Feeds, where Phil Johnson guided us on a very informative tour of his farm and the work carried out under the DEFRA stewardship scheme. It was a wonderful insight on the various activities of farming and the dedication that Phil and his family put into practices and methods that are beneficial to wildlife and the environment.

If you would like a full tick list for any of our past field trips, please let Dennis know which you require. A master list of each trip is available for viewing at each meeting.

Please support our seed sales! 2kg bags will be available at meetings for you to buy on the night.

If you would like to help or can contribute in any way towards the compilation of the newsletter, please contact Dennis.