

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH LEICESTER BIRDWATCHERS

Issue no. 6

April 2007



Welcome to the latest newsletter. As most of you are aware, we are now into full swing with our indoor meeting programme, even though we had a slight hiccup in February. Hopefully, you are finding them entertaining! There's been some nice sightings on the field trips as well as enjoying good weather - and there's plans for our first trip using coach travel.

As announced at our March meeting, our Chairman, Paul Inchley, suffered a mild stroke at the beginning of March. Although recovery may be a slow process, Paul is showing excellent signs of improvement. Our thoughts and best wishes go out to Paul and we hope to see him taking part in our activities again very soon.

Due to ill health, Dan Roselli is unlikely to be able to join us in our activities for the rest of the year. We wish Dan and his family all the best in the future months and thank Dan for his support of the SLB.

Library

The April meeting sees the launch of our library, where you can borrow books and magazines for a monthly period. The only rule is that if you keep a book for more than a month, then there is a fee of £1.00 for every overdue month. Many thanks to those who have already donated books and magazines, especially Gary Abel, who has now jetted off to New Zealand. We have a full collection of Bird Watching magazines - the past 4 years - but no copies of Birdwatch magazine. If you have any you don't need anymore, please see Dennis at one of the meetings. All will be gratefully received!

Can You Help ?

Well, they say many hands make light work. As you can appreciate, running club meetings and field trips, along with other background activities takes a lot of time and effort. Would you like to help? We're looking for active club members to help the committee with the organisational duties.

If you are interested, please talk to one of the committee members. Your help will be appreciated by all in the smooth running of SLB.

Random Jottings...

It's probably a bit late to say it now, but Spring is in the air! The migrants are arriving (and departing), nests are being built and the air is filling with song. After a very mild winter, the signs start to appear. Just a trip out into the garden and you can see it - frog spawn on the pond in the middle of February, bumble bees starting their sorties, a ladybird in the leaf litter and the first buds on the apple tree. Has anyone seen a Swallow yet - will we see them arriving early this year?

Do you keep notes of what you see? It can show you patterns that you may not realise are happening. My 200+ winter Starlings have now gone and only my 30 odd residents remain. I have a pair of Bullfinches that appear every year - just for 2 weeks at the end of March, feeding on the sunflower hearts. The past 3 years I've had a Willow Warbler visit - passing through for just a week - in April. Will he appear this year? I'll be watching out.

I've tried something different in the way I feed in the garden and I've seen some fascinating results. My garden is reasonably large and I've always had feeders scattered in different places. Towards the end of last year, the local white Doves from down the road realised that there was plenty of food at no. 28 and adopted me - all 20 of them (but a count down the road the other day - there were 45)! This stopped my four Stock Doves from visiting, as well as the Collared Doves and Wood Pigeons. So I stopped ground feeding and didn't put food on the table - the Doves were stopping all the other birds anyway.

The Doves are now happy to feed on the spills from the feeders in the apple tree at the bottom of the garden. But look what's happened - I've now got a pair of Robins and a pair of Blackbirds nesting in the ivy by the house, a pair of Great Tits looking at the nest box and Blue Tits and a Wren feeding in the borders! A bit of redirection of traffic has changed the way birds visit the garden.

In the last couple of weeks, there's been some very unexpected visitors - a male and female Mallard! First of all the pond seemed to be the attraction, but now they've taken a liking to the sunflower feeder spills (sharing with the Doves) and the bread on the lawn that is meant for the Starlings. Then a second female appeared. I assume that they are from the large pond on Grove Road. Let's just hope that they don't bring the Canada Geese with them! A couple of Wigeon might be nice though...

Dennis Taylor

Indoor Meetings

Well, we've certainly had three different evenings for you! January saw Paul Fuller give an illustrated talk on the origins of the names of our British birds. Our February meeting had to be rearranged at very short notice (4 hours!) and our grateful thanks go to Ron Kilsby for stepping in and showing three excellent archive RSPB cine films.

March saw an extremely humorous, but very informative insight to our national bird, the Robin. David Tideswell's unique presentation will be remembered for a long, long time (eh?!)

We know it's early, but the next newsletter (out July) will contain details of our Annual General Meeting to be held in October.

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

April 11th 2007 - 'Within These Shores'

Mick Muddiman will give an illustrated talk on the flora and fauna of the British Isles throughout the year.

May 9th 2007 - "Welsh Birds"

Barry Raine will be talking on the birds found in Wales. Those going on the Welsh weekend trip should find this talk of particular interest.

June 13th 2007 - "The Osprey Project"

Tim Mackrill, Project Manager at Rutland Water.

September 12th 2007 - "Bird Migration"

An illustrated talk by Peter Holden of the RSPB.

October 10th 2007 - Annual General Meeting**November 14th 2007 - "British Birds of Prey"**

An audio visual show by Nick Williams

December 12th 2007 - Christmas Dinner

Details TBA.

An Hour's Trip to... by Paul Seaton

PITSFORD RESERVOIR, HOLCOT, NORTHANTS

Before visiting Pitsford, it should be noted that a permit is required for bird watching at this site. These are available from the Fishing Lodge at Holcot, but if you have a valid annual Explorer pass from Anglian Water this will allow you in without the need to purchase a permit. On arrival, park at the public car park at The Causeway.

The birds at this car park are very hungry and readily approach newly arrived cars on the lookout for the next free meal. The Black Headed Gulls, Canada Geese, Mute Swans, Mallards and even Common Gulls and Coots will welcome you if you have a potential meal. It is a cold January (2007) day, but the sun is out and there is plenty of activity. On the causeway wall there are 30+ Lapwing and about 20 Dunlin. All the usual suspects are on the water - Great Crested Grebe, Tufted Duck, Wigeon and lots of Gulls. A scan of the trees behind the car park finds House Sparrow, a flock of Greenfinch and the odd Redwing and Fieldfare. OK, now into the nature reserve. You will need to cross over the causeway road and down a few steps to enter. Immediately, you have good views across the water and there are plenty of Wigeon and Pochard in view. The light is good and this shows up five pairs of Goldeneye very nicely indeed. Heading towards the first hide, two Cormorants fly high overhead. Before reaching the hide, on the left there is a path with hedgerow on both sides and here the birds are literally dripping off the trees. The whole area is alive with birds on the move. Amazingly, most are Yellowhammers and Tree Sparrows - a beautiful combination. On further inspection there are many birds at tree top level, including Starling, Redwing and Fieldfare. The Fieldfare come so close (unusual) - I'm checking them for tonsillitis!!

Nothing new across the water from the first hide, so I press on to the next. This hide reveals one of our declining species - the Ruddy Duck. 20+ here, the most I have seen together in a long while. Here at Pitsford large numbers of Ruddy have been shot, a good reason for their decline! Is this anyway to treat our American friends?

Upon leaving this hide you are now on the edge of woodland. Take the waterside walk at this point. Here you pick up all the usual woodland birds - Blue, Great and Long Tailed Tits, Wren etc. At the bottom of Scaldwell Bay there are two hides close together that give excellent views across the water, if only visiting for a short while this is the point to turn round and head back. I took the path on the edge of the woodland for my return and immediately came across a Goldcrest at head height, followed by a Kestrel relaxing on a gate in the sunshine. Not a bad idea.

At Pitsford there are eight bird hides to visit, but to do them all you will need to do a seven mile circular walk of the nature reserve, so allow plenty of time. There are toilets at the Fishing Lodge and at nearby Brixworth Country Park, there is a café, shop and more toilet facilities. It takes less than an hour to get here and the route is very easy. Take the A6 to Market Harborough and then the A508 towards Northampton. Pitsford is well signposted off this road.

And finally the ones that got away. On the day I visited Pitsford there were reports of six Brambling and a Red Throated Diver. Well, you can't get them all!

Sightings and Reports

Here are the highlights of our recent field trip sightings:

13th January 2007 - Holkham. (60 species)

Many Geese - Pink Footed, White Fronted, Barnacle & Brent (with a possible sighting of a Snow Goose!). Marsh Harrier and Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl, Shore Lark and Nuthatch (for the lucky few). Meadow Pipit and Goldcrest.

17th February 2007 - Fermyn Woods & Titchmarsh. (58 species)

Black Necked Grebe, Little Egret, Pintail, Goldeneye, Goosander, Red Kite, Stonechat, Sky Lark, Fieldfare & Redwing, Goldcrest, Willow Tit and Yellowhammer.

17th March 2007 - Brandon Marsh. (47 species)

Snipe, Kingfisher, Sand Martin, Cetti's Warbler, Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Willow Tit, Jay, Redpoll and Reed Bunting.

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 meetings.

On a different note, were you on our field trip last July to Blacktoft Sands? If so, you may remember that we saw a Wigeon with a yellow wing tag. I duly reported the sighting via the BTO website and eventually received the following details: Wing tag CB, ring number FP95104; 1st year male, date of ringing 07/02/2006 at Dunham-on-Trent, North Notts. (grid ref SK8174).

If you ever see a bird with a ring or wing tag, please take details and report it (let me know - I'll even do it for you!) as it is a vital part of the bird ringing process.

Dennis Taylor

A Local Patch ... by Paul Seaton

KNIGHTON SPINNEY, KNIGHTON PARK, LEICESTER.

Here we have the remains of what was once a much larger oak woodland dating back many hundreds of years. Local history has it that oak from this area was used to build Henry VIII's warships. Luckily that large lump of lard didn't get them all!! So birds and birdwatchers still have a few trees to enjoy.

The spinney is managed by Environ and strictly speaking permission is required to enter, but as I know the warden and also I have a key to the gate (very handy!) there is no problem getting in. On this visit I have arrived early at 8.15a.m, it is a Saturday in February, a crisp cold morning with beautiful sunshine. First bird is a brightly coloured male Bullfinch perched right on top of one of those tall oak trees. The whole of the spinney is alive with bird song, including the drumming of Great Spotted Woodpeckers - they take it in turn tapping out their morse code to one another - and after some time I actually managed to see one.

Next up, a Nuthatch, looking rather nice in the early morning sun. The Nuthatch and Great Spotted Woodpecker both breed in the spinney. All the usual woodland birds are present including Blue, Great and Long Tailed Tits, Robin, Wren, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Blackbird. Song Thrushes love singing from the tree tops and today is no exception and, of course, the ideal time of year to see and hear them.

You will not get lost in the Spinney, as there is just one circular footpath all the way round. Go quietly and just stand for a while to enjoy this little woodland and you may be lucky, as I was, to have a Tree Creeper no more than three yards away. Then a few steps further on, excellent views of a Goldcrest. All this in less than an hour!! Not bad and less than a mile from my front door. The spinney is worth a visit anytime of the year and is open to the public some Sunday's, contact Environ for details.

The spinney is located off the A563 ring road, use the Knighton Park car park. The park is well signposted off the ring road.

Bird Seed Sales

Please fill in your requirements on the order forms provided and place in the order tray, along with your payment, on the entrance table. Your order will be available for collection at the next club meeting.

Please support our efforts in providing seed sales. Lack of orders will force us to withdraw this service!

Field Trips

Already announced at our last meetings, we have organised a trip to Martin Mere in November (see page 8). This will be our first outing using coach travel. We still have around 10 places available, so if you would like to go, please contact Paul Seaton.

Saturday 14th April 2007 - NWT Holme Dunes - Holme Next The Sea, Norfolk

Start 7.30am at Blaby Scout centre. There is a charge of £2.00 per head for reserve entry.

Friday/Saturday/Sunday 11th/12th/13th May 2007 - Welsh Weekend

See Paul Seaton for full, separate details. One place available.

Saturday 2nd June 2007 - Roydon Common & Flitcham Abbey Farm, Norfolk

Fully booked.

Saturday 16th June 2007 - Eyebrook Reservoir & Rectory Farm Great Easton, Leicestershire / Rutland

Start 7.30am at Blaby Scout centre.

23rd May - Crow Mills/Mill Lane, Blaby.

Meet at The Manor, Glen Parva at 6.45pm. Cost £1.00, payable on the night.

11th July - Lucas Marsh/Brocks Hill Country Park, Oadby.

Meet outside the visitor centre at 6.45pm. HQ of the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. Cost £1.00, payable on the night.

29th July - Wicken Fen Bird Ringing Demonstration

Fully booked. Details will be announced closer to the event

1st August - Fosse Meadows Nature Reserve, Sharnford

Meet at the first car park at the reserve at 6.45pm. Cost £1.00, payable on the night.

11th August - Rutland Water - Osprey Cruise

We will depart from Blaby Scout HQ at 11.00am to arrive at Rutland around midday. The event starts at 3:45pm with a talk at the Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre, Egleton. We then travel independently to Whitwell for the cruise, boarding the Rutland Belle at 5:00pm and finishing approx. 6:45pm.

Fully booked. Balance payment of £10 required by June 13th meeting please.

Details of the trips will be announced closer to the dates. Please contact Paul Seaton.

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 7.00am.

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 7.00am.

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. If you are a WWT member entry is free, just pay the cost of the coach and don't forget your membership card on the day.

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. 7.00am 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

Booking forms available at the May meeting, Bookings, along with payment please, by 20th August to Paul Seaton.

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