



A new year and we've got most of it planned already! All the indoor meetings are arranged with speakers – with June seeing a meeting with a little difference. The September to December Field Trip programme will be announced in the next newsletter (out May) and there will be something old and something new.

Lots to look forward to and lots to do. Our proposed nest box scheme is now taking shape (see page 2 for details). And don't forget to let us know your local sightings so that we announce them at our meetings.

As you will see, we've featured pictures taken by two of our members on our field trip to Martin Mere. Although column space is limited within the newsletter, if you wish to contribute a picture or small article, please let Dennis have your efforts and we will try to fit it in.



Whooper Swans at Martin Mere - Photo by David Luyt

Nest Box Scheme

During our last AGM, we announced that we could invest some of our surplus funds into a bird related conservation scheme. At the January meeting we proposed a nest box programme and most of you supported the idea. Well, the committee have been busy sorting things out and are pleased to announce the plans.

Very kindly, Phil Johnson at Rectory Farm (who runs Eyebrook Bird Feeds and supplies our seeds) has offered the use of 2 sites within his farm complex where we can erect nesting boxes.

One site is relatively 'young' and is on the edge of two acres of set aside. We actually visited this area last year when we were shown around the farm. It's a small copse with hawthorn hedgerow. Our proposal here is to site hole fronted boxes, open fronted boxes and 2 colony boxes (hopefully to encourage Tree Sparrows).

The second site is a more mature copse, again with hawthorn hedges. Here, our proposal is to site hole fronted boxes and open fronted boxes. Nearby is a mature Ash tree, which we could try to encourage Little Owl and Treecreeper.

Our main target nesting birds are Tree Sparrow, Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Wren. If we're very lucky we might get Pied Wagtail or Spotted Flycatcher!

On our first visit to look at the sites, there were around 40 Yellowhammer in the hedges – that's a good start.

As with any scheme, we will need to record the sites on a regular basis to monitor our success rate. So this is where you come in. We will need volunteers to visit the sites regularly and record what they see. Not just in the two nest box areas, but in the surroundings as well. Don't forget there will be ground nesting birds, as well as those that don't use boxes, (e.g. Pheasant, Thrushes, Warblers, etc.). As an added bonus, you can visit the reservoir, which is just a short walk away!

Each site visit will be made on an organised basis so as to cause minimum disturbance and disruption. If you are interested in committing a couple of hours on each visit to monitor the sites, please talk a committee member.

The next issue of the newsletter will appear in May

A Winter Walk - Crow Mills, Sth Wigston to The Manor Pub, Glen Parva

Here we have a largely unspoilt part of Leicestershire and it's on the doorstep of SLB members. You can start this walk at The Manor in Glen Parva or at Crow Mills car park at Countesthorpe Road, as this is a circular route (I usually start at Crow Mills). On leaving the car park turn right and cross the bridge and right down the tarmac road. Immediately to your left is The Great Central Way (another potential walk). After you have left the urban sprawl behind and are faced with open fields and hedgerows. You will find most of your common birds on this walk. It is a particularly good area for Song and Mistle Thrush. Watch the fields and especially on the ground in the areas containing horses, there are several stables along the route. Green Woodpecker is also a regular in this area.

Keep an eye on the old Oak trees to the right hand side of the lane (Near LBJ Stables) for possible Little Owl. There are often mixed flocks of Finches around containing the usual suspects of Green, Gold and Chaffinch. It's worth noting that this is probably the best area locally for our winter visiting Thrushes, they are almost guaranteed on a winter walk. It is a December day and just when you are wondering where the Redwings may be, you see movement on the ground, a lot of movement, into view on the binoculars are a 100+ Redwings feeding feverishly and one Pheasant joining in.

Continuing down Mill Lane take a left just past the small-disused church, this is a good spot for Goldcrest. Continue down the lane for about 50 yards, then look in the field to the left. Here you will see a large dead tree, a good place for Great Spotted Woodpecker but not today! But Fieldfare are a good alternative and there are several about. Stand here for 10/15 minutes as this is a good spot for birds passing through; in the summer this is an ideal viewing point for Swallows and House Martins. Return back to Mill Lane, take a left and then opposite the cemetery turn right towards the ford and The Manor Pub. Go around to the front of the pub and turn right towards South Wigston. As you approach the canal bridge there is a narrow lane leading down to the canal towpath and once at the waters edge, turn right. You have arrived at the Grand Union Canal. Here you should see some of our common water birds, Mallard, Coot etc. If you are lucky maybe a Kingfisher and today is my lucky day. On arriving at the towpath I immediately find a perched Kingfisher on the far bank, I move closer and it finds a perch further down stream, this is repeated for about 15 minutes until I reach the first lock and then lose sight of him. It's as good as any of those nature programmes on the telly watching this wonderful bird.

I thought I had re found the Kingfisher, but it turned out to be a male Bullfinch with his wife - still a nice consolation! Just past the lock is a good area for House Sparrow.

As you approach the next bridge there is a sign on the right for Crow Mills picnic site - turn to the right here and this will lead back to the car park. Allow yourself at least two hours to complete this walk.

Paul Seaton

Indoor Meetings

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

February 13th 2008 - "Birdlife on Britain's Smaller Islands"

An illustrated talk by Christopher Hall

March 12th 2008 - Waders

An illustrated talk by Barry Raine.

April 9th 2008 - RSPB Movie Memories Revisited

A welcome return by Ron Kilsby, showing a selection of films from his 16mm cine collection.

May 14th 2008 - The Farm

An illustrated talk by Paul Hobson.

June 11th 2008 - Meet the Owls

Countesthorpe based John Leach and Janette Higgs will talk about their work on owl rescue and introduce you to some of their friends.

No meetings will be held during July or August.

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

Please attend early, if you wish to renew your membership, book trips or order seed..

2008 Field Trips

16th February 2008 - Potteric Carr, Doncaster, South Yorkshire

A Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve situated just South East of Doncaster. The terrain includes marsh and areas of open water. This is one of the best sites in England to try to find the elusive Bittern and February is probably the best month for sightings. Facilities here include 12 hides, a visitor centre, café and toilets.

Cost £3.50, which includes permit for the day.

15th March 2008 - Snettisham, Norfolk

A visit to this reserve is usually pretty good and even better on the day of a high tide and today is that day. There is a high tide due around midday, which hopefully should force thousands of waders close in to shore for us to view. Facilities here include four hides. There are no toilets but we can normally use those on the local caravan site.

Cost £2.00 for the day.

12th April 2008 - The Christopher Cadbury Reserve, Upton Warren, Worcestershire

A Worcestershire Wildlife Trust reserve, regarded as the best bird watching site in the county. Varied habitats, there are seven hides on site but no visitor centre or toilets. This is a small reserve, so if time allows, we may also visit the Wyre Forest nr Bewdley (this may incur a small additional cost - payable on the day).

Cost £3.00 including permit for the day.

9th - 11th May 2008 - East Anglia Weekend

Trip fully booked. Full details will be available during April.

17th May 2008 - Paxton Pits, Little Paxton, Huntingdonshire

Lakes, meadow, grassland, scrub and woodland. Facilities include hides, toilets and visitor centre. One of the best places in the country to hear and see Nightingale.

Cost £4.50 including permit for the day.

14th June 2008 - RSPB Ouse Washes, Manea, Cambridgeshire

An area of lowland wet grassland and open water. There are up to 70 species of bird that breed on the reserve. There are ten hides on site, a visitor centre (which is unmanned?) and toilet facilities are available.

Cost £2.00 for the day, assuming you are an RSPB member.

Field Trip Sightings

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

17th November 2007 - Martin Mere (49 species)

Our first coach trip and very successful too. Whooper Swans, Pintail, Ruff, Stonechat, Tree Sparrow and Goldcrest. Nice close ups of Smew, Long Tailed Duck and other wildfowl in the collection. A frenzied feeding time and the day ended with an excellent wheeling flock of Starlings



Ruff at Martin Mere - Photo by Sue McKenlay

15th December 2007 - Pitsford Reservoir (63 species)

A very cold morning by the water! Little Egret, Pintail, Goldeneye, Goosander, Ruddy Duck, Redshank, Treecreeper and Yellowhammer.

27th December 2007 - Hollowell & Ravensthorpe Reservoirs (47 species)

A break away from the Xmas festivities and a pub lunch! Goldeneye, Ruddy Duck, Snipe, Grey Wagtail, Chiffchaff and Bullfinch.

12th January 2008 - Far Ings (53 species)

Another successful coach trip and a walk under the Humber Bridge! Goldeneye, Smew, Ruddy Duck, Marsh Harrier, Sanderling, Curlew, Redshank, Tree Sparrow and Siskin.

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! 2 & 5kg bags will be available at meetings for you to buy on the night.