

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH LEICESTER BIRDWATCHERS

Issue no. 5

January 2007



Happy New Year !

Here's to wishing everyone a prosperous 2007! And it won't take you long to see that the latest newsletter has double the content - in fact, given the time, we could have issued a complete magazine!

Please make sure to put all the dates in your diaries, as we've got a lot on our planned agenda for the coming year. That's all because our members have shown the enthusiasm and encouragement that has made the initiation of our club so worthwhile. Who would have thought this time last year, that we would be where we are now.

Christmas Dinner



Our very first annual Christmas Dinner took place at The Manor, Glen Parva on the 13th December and an excellent evening it was too!

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Report from your Treasurer

Since you have all parted with various amounts of cash to the club since our formation in September, you may occasionally wonder "where has all the money gone?" If you do - rest assured, all is well.

You will remember that when we established the club we had to make assumptions about the number of members we would have and who would go on trips, since these are our prime sources of income. We assumed a minimum of 40 members and we now have 56. We also assumed an average of 23 members on each trip and so far we have averaged 30. As a result, our income has comfortably exceeded our expectations. To save you working it out, our gross income to date is approx. £1500, but we still have our meetings and speakers to pay for up to June this year. Anyway, our finances are good.

For Sale / Wanted

Through the SLB newsletter, we're offering you the chance to advertise any of your surplus stock of bird goodies, or ask for anything you're particularly looking for, to other members. Please let Dennis have your details for inclusion in the next newsletter (due out April).

Don't forget!

RSPB Big
Garden
Birdwatch
27 - 28 Jan

Library

We will be starting a library of books and magazines that people may borrow on a monthly basis, available at meetings. If you have any unwanted bird related items please give them to a committee member.

Indoor Meetings

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

January 10th 2007 - "Strange Name For a Bird"

The origins of English bird names explained by Paul Fuller, who is a freelance wildlife film maker.

February 14th 2007 - "Little Brown Jobs"

Jeff Baker, from the BTO, about identifying small brown birds, especially warblers.

March 14th 2007 - " Our Friendly Garden Robin"

David Tideswell. Everything you need to know about Robins – and more! David will be bringing a selection of bird boxes along, which you can buy on the night.

April 11th 2007

(TBC)

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.

Please note that there will be no indoor meetings held during July & August (recommencing September 12th 2007).

Doors are open from 7.15pm, meetings start at 7.30pm, finishing at approx. 9.30pm. Please come and support our speakers, as they will have travelled many miles and given their time to talk to us.

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.

Sightings and Reports

Here are the highlights of our recent field trip sightings:

14th October 2006 - Gibraltar Point. (68 species)

Gannet, Pink Footed & Brent Geese, Marsh Harrier, Grey & Golden Plover, Knot, Little Stint, Greenshank, Sandwich Tern, Short Eared Owl, Kingfisher, Redwing and Yellowhammer. And a dead Guillemot on the beach!

11th November 2006 - RSPB Titchwell Marsh. (64 species)

Pink Footed & Brent Geese, Pintail, Goldeneye, Water Rail, Grey Plover, Ruff, Spotted Redshank, Bar & Black Tailed Godwits, Stonechat, Cetti's Warbler and Brambling. And the stranded baby seal on the beach!

9th December 2006 - RSPB Sandwell Valley. (47 species)

Goldeneye, Ruddy Duck, Goosander, Tree Sparrow, Bullfinch and Reed Bunting.

28th December 2006 - Watermead Park. (52 species)

Goldeneye, Goosander, Golden Plover, Kingfisher, Stonechat, Goldcrest, Willow Tit, Reed Bunting and for those who stayed - the Starlings returning to roost.

If you would like a full tick list please let Dennis know.

Identification Tips

Birdwatching can be difficult at times, but here are a few useful tips on how to distinguish certain species.

Whooper and Bewick's Swans - look at the base of the yellow beak markings this way : on the Whooper Swan, it is pointed like a 'W' (for Whooper); on the Bewick's Swan, it is rounded like a 'B' (for Bewick's).

Great Spotted Woodpecker - the red patch on the head tells you: on the top of the head = juvenile; at the back of the head = male; no red = female.

Golden and Grey Plover - when flying, Golden Plover has a dark rump and is white underwing, whereas a Grey Plover has a white rump and, seen from below, has a black wing pit.

Bar Tailed Godwit - compared to the Black Tailed, it has: shorter legs, with more feathering around the tops: a slightly upcurved bill; no white wing bar in flight, but a white V over the rump (and a barred tail, of course!)

An Hour's Trip to...

SALCEY FOREST, HARTWELL, NORTHANTS

It was one of those rare Winter days in England - it was very cold and snowing! I found myself at Salcey Forest for a short lunch break. An ideal place to search for those elusive woodland birds, but given the weather I wasn't expecting to see a great deal. By chance I had parked in front of a bird feeding station with 3 or 4 peanut feeders and a bird table with mixed seed on.

The first bird spotted was not at the feeders, but waiting in the trees behind. A Jay was looking at the bird table. He chose his moment and headed for the base of the table to hoover up the fallen seed. After that, the birds just kept on coming both to the bird table and to the feeders a frenzy of activity. A winter paradise and I hadn't even got out of the car!!

Highlights at the feeding station included several visits by Nuthatch and Willow Tit plus all the usual suspects: Great Tit; Coal Tit and Blue Tit; Greenfinch; Chaffinch; Robin; Dunnock and House Sparrows.

Below, a lovely pair of Tree Creepers worked their way up towards the feeders before flying off. Meanwhile, on the peanuts, a very hungry Greater Spotted Woodpecker got stuck into his dinner. All three of the British Woodpeckers breed and can be seen in Salcey Forest. (Good luck with the Lesser Spotted!)

There are three woodland trails varying from a 30 minute walk to a four hour hike. There are toilet facilities on site and more recently a woodland café has been added. It is open most days and there is a small feeding station outside the café.

The Forestry Commission has recently spent a mere £700,000 pounds on creating a "Tree Top Walk" that is 300 metres long and rises up by 20m to give a birds eye view of the forest. Do not attempt this if you are not keen on heights!! And yes, it is meant to wobble naturally. At the top of this walkway is a "crows nest" giving excellent views across the top of the forest and over Northamptonshire. I imagine this would be a brilliant place to watch birds in early Spring or Summer for visiting warblers and our own all year round residents.

Salcey is reached very easily via the M1 junction 15 and then the A508. The forest being located just outside the village of Hartwell and approximately 45 miles from Blaby. Well worth a visit.

NB: Take a bag of mixed seed for the bird table just in case there is no food out for the birds.

Paul Seaton

Bird Ringing at Wicken Fen by Paul Seaton

Back in November, very early one Sunday morning (6.00am!), eight guinea pigs set off for a Bird Ringing Demonstration at Wicken Fen Nature Reserve. The idea being to check out the suitability of this type of event for a future group visit. I didn't know what to expect and I'd booked the event!! I half expected not to see any birds ringed at all and was prepared for a talk on what they did and the equipment used to achieve the end result. Here's what actually happened:

We arrived at 7.45am and were pointed in the direction of an open sided barn where we were given an introductory talk on the reasons for ringing, areas chosen to ring etc. It was a windy day (not good for ringing) and the rain was not far away, but it was becoming clear that the mist nets were scattered around the reserve and as soon as any birds were caught we would see some practical bird ringing going on. The first birds to arrive were Blue Tits and a Wren, all of which had previously been rung, but despite this they are all weighed and wing measurements are taken. A note is taken of the ring number and the number of the net they were caught in, all information is passed to the BTO Ringing Unit for collation.

Next in were more Blue Tits, Great Tits, a Goldcrest and a Treecreeper. I have to say having seen the Treecreeper in the hand, I now believe it to be one of the most beautifully marked birds in Britain. A short break for breakfast and a superb bacon butty in the café and off we went to view the mist nets - lots more Blue Tits, Long Tailed Tits and a lovely male Bullfinch. All were expertly and delicately removed from the nets, placed in cotton bags and taken back to HQ for recording. The weighing process is pretty basic with the birds being stuffed into empty 35mm film containers! In they went head first and then placed on the scales for a weight check. There were various other sized Tupperware type containers which are used for weighing depending on the size of the catch. Throughout the ringing process the birds were well looked after and hardly seemed stressed by their experience.

Back to the nets and more Long Tailed Tits, Blue Tits, another Treecreeper and the biggest bird of the day, a Jay. Compared to the rest of the day's catch, the Jay was a beast of a bird. The ringer who removed him from the net was soon bleeding from a sharp peck and this bird only just fitted in the cotton bag. Back to HQ and the ringing of the bird. To give you an idea of the size of this bird, it weighed almost 10 times more than any other bird caught on the day.

I could go on for pages, but quite simply for me it was one of the best days birding I have ever enjoyed. It also made me realise that if we do this activity as a group, numbers would have to be restricted to no more than 12 people. If Wicken Fen organise a Summer ringing session in 2007, I will book spaces - but be warned you will have to be out of bed by 3.00am and on the road by 4.00am to be at Wicken Fen by 6.00am - and it will be a Sunday morning!



A wonderful Treecreeper



A Goldcrest in the mist net

Back at HQ



Photos by Jools Partridge & Dennis Taylor



The Jav

Field Trips

Our latest field trip program is now into full swing and takes us up to the end of June. A limited number of places are still available, so please see Paul Seaton if you wish to come along (please note that the Roydon Common / Flitcham Abbey Farm trip is now fully booked).

Welsh Weekend Field Trip

All places are now fully booked for this trip. Details for the weekend's itinerary will be available from Paul Seaton in the coming weeks.

Osprey Cruise - Rutland Water

We've reserved 35 places on the Osprey cruise at Rutland Water for Sat 11th August. So far, 30 of the places are already booked! A deposit of £5.00 per person is required by the 15th January for the remaining places. We will depart from Blaby Scout HQ at 11.00am to arrive at Rutland around midday, to allow a few hours birdwatching before the cruise event starts at 3:45pm, at the Anglian Water Birdwatching Centre, Egleton. There will be refreshments on arrival and an illustrated introductory talk, describing what we hope to see and do during the evening. We then travel independently to Whitwell for the cruise, boarding the Rutland Belle at 5:00pm. Total cost is £15 per person.

Summer Evening Walks

Three summer evening walks are planned, each starting at 6.45pm and finishing approx. 9.00pm. There will be a charge of £1.00 per walk, payable on the night. Booking forms will be available at the February meeting

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

Meet at The Manor, Glen Parva. A gentle walk down the bridle way towards Crow Mills in South Wigston. A beautiful, unspoilt area and as a bonus, SLB member Jo Ball has kindly agreed to serve us tea and biscuits half way round our walk.

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

Meet outside the visitor centre at 6.45pm. HQ of the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust and a beautiful area to walk round. A good chance of Yellowhammer and possibly Little Owl. Lucas Marsh usually holds breeding warblers.

1st August - Fosse Meadows NR, Sharnford

Meet at the first car park at the reserve. Another local nature reserve worthy of a visit. An area of meadow with a couple of pools to check out and a good mix of birdlife.