



for birds
for people
for ever

The Heron



Newsletter - April 2006



WOW 2006

Hopefully, it will not have escaped your notice that in September 2006 we are repeating our **Wildlife and Outdoor World Extravaganza** that was such a success two years ago. The event, which we are calling **WOW 2006**, now has its own logo designed specially by Rob Hutchings. It depicts a curlew against a moorland background appropriately symbolising the target to which the proceeds from this year's event will be directed, namely the 'Peak Birds Project'. This project is a joint venture between The RSPB and the Peak District National Park Authority aimed at arresting the decline in upland breeding birds such as curlew, lapwing and twite through specific habitat improvement.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group will take place on Tuesday, 9 May 2006 at 7.45 pm in the Senior Citizens' Hall, Duke Street Car Park, Macclesfield

Once again, nominations are being invited for membership of the Committee. These should be submitted in writing to our Secretary, Margaret Ward along with signed letters from those proposing and seconding the nominee. We are sure that you will agree with your Committee that a gradual turnover of its members and assimilation of 'new blood' would be beneficial both to the stability and future of the Group. The closing date for nominations for Committee is Tuesday, 2 May 2006. For details of submission rules and procedures please contact any member of the Committee.

If any of you have interesting slides, digital photographs or video sequences of birds or wildlife that you would like to share with other members of the Group following this year's AGM, please contact David Tolliday (01625 432105).

Did You Know?

Birds will start to look scruffy after they have finished rearing their young, moulting their ragged feathers ready for autumn. They may look ill, but replacing these feathers is critical to their survival.

If a long-tailed tit's nest fails, the pair of birds splits up and each goes off to help at its brother's nest. Nests with helpers raise more chicks than those without.

Kestrels see a wider range of wavelengths of light than we do, so that they can detect mice and voles in long grass by seeing their trails of ultra-violet urine.

CHAT FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends,

Although anticipated, the arrival in the UK of 'bird flu' or more specifically avian influenza type H5N1 has dominated the news media over the past few days. There has been a great deal of conjecture about how the mute swan [*Ed. DNA testing has now shown it to be a whooper swan, 11 April*] found dead in Cellardyke harbour acquired the disease especially as the strain of the virus with which it was infected is almost identical to that found in dead swans during February on the German island of Rügen in the Baltic Sea. Let us hope that it is an isolated case – certainly negative results so far from tests on swans and other dead birds in the immediate area is encouraging.

Our wild birds face not only the possibility of 'bird flu' but also a public reaction against them. Although any reaction in the UK is unlikely to be as extreme as that seen in certain parts of Europe where birds and their nests have been destroyed, people's reticence to continue feeding the birds in their gardens for fear of contracting 'bird flu' could spell disaster for some species that rely on garden 'take-aways'. The breeding season is underway in less than ideal conditions following a long harsh winter and, so far, cold spring. As a result, there are fewer insects about which will affect not only resident bird species but also our recently arrived summer migrants who rely on this food source. Conservation organisations, including The RSPB, are stressing that it should be business as usual for feeding garden birds. They are suggesting that it is more important than ever for us to put out high-energy seeds, fat and mealworms. Breeding is costly for adult birds in terms of calories and the survival of young birds is significantly increased if they get a high protein diet during the first few weeks of life.

The RSPB have issued the following advice:

It is still considered extremely unlikely that bird flu could be transmitted to people by feeding birds in the garden. Nevertheless, good hygiene is recommended both to protect the birds that feed in our gardens and ourselves. This is the single most important action we can take in relation to bird flu. In all circumstances after handling bird feeders, or feeding birds wash your hands with soap and water. Bird feeders should be washed and cleaned regularly to prevent spread of diseases such as salmonella. This should be done outside in your garden with dilute disinfectant (normal household bleach diluted 1:20).

Where possible avoid touching any dead birds. If you HAVE to move a dead bird (eg. if a cat brings one into your house), invert a plastic bag over your hand, pick the bird up in the plastic, draw the bag over your hand and tie it up (like using a dog pooper-scooper). Then seal the bag, place it inside a second bag, tie it off and dispose of it in your usual household waste then wash your hands with soap and water. Any clothing that has been in contact with the dead bird should be washed using ordinary washing detergent at the temperature normally used for washing the clothing. Any contaminated indoor surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned with normal household cleaner.

The RSPB have recently instituted a 'Bird Flu Updates' page on its website providing the latest news on this disease as well as links to additional background information and advice: www.rspb.org.uk/policy/avianinfluenza/latest.asp

The arrival of summer migrants in our area of Cheshire began slowly during the latter part of March with reports of both sand and house martins followed by chiffchaffs. Wheatears and ring ousel have appeared in their moorland habitats and the first swallows returned in reasonable numbers last week. Let us hope that the weather conditions improve soon. If not, it may be a poor breeding season for many birds particularly the hirundines who are dependent at all times on a plentiful supply of winged insects.

Further confirmation of climate change and its effects on bird populations was revealed this week. Not only is there increasing evidence (although maybe not this year!) that spring events such as the arrival of migrant birds and blossoming of trees has been occurring progressively earlier in the Northern Hemisphere over the past 50 years, now there is evidence that, in Antarctica, the opposite is occurring and seabirds are arriving and breeding later in response to climate change. Although there has been a reduction in sea ice, that which is present is remaining longer restricting access to colonies and feeding sites. The researchers are sure that this doesn't represent the whole story but it means that juvenile birds could be fledging just before winter leaving little time for them to learn how to find their own food prior to the onset of harsh conditions.

As this is our last monthly Newsletter for the 2005 - 2006 Season, I wish to take the opportunity on your behalf to thank Mike Thompson, our Editor, for the sterling work he has done in producing an up-to-date edition every month. Judging by the number of you that we see assiduously reading each new edition prior to Indoor Meetings, we can only assume that Mike is continuing to get the content just about right. Nevertheless, we would still like to receive contributions, no matter how short, from a wider section of the membership.

Although our April Indoor Meeting is the penultimate of the 2005 – 2006 Season, we have a full programme of activities over the next few months to hopefully satisfy all tastes. See separate 'For Your Diary' page for full details and please do your best to support at least one of these events. Thank you.

Ray Evans
Group Leader and Chairman of the Committee

THE HARD-TO-FIND HAWFINCH

This is a large heavy finch - big head, bull neck, huge beak internally ribbed so that cracking seeds and cherry stones is no problem. Once it was aptly called "The Grosbeak". It occurs in mixed woods, parks and gardens with tall deciduous trees. With a widespread distribution you might think it a fairly easy bird to find.

No way. This is one of the most difficult and elusive species in England. Why? It is generally shy, well concealed, a furtive frequenter and forager of treetops and thick yew bushes, a lover of cover and avoider of humans. Its call is a mere "blip" and it is mainly silent, its heavy flight brief and localised. In summer it seems to "disappear" and finding its nest with pale olive green speckled eggs must be a rare event indeed. It tends to favour a few preferred sites widely spread out and cannot be expected in woods, parks and gardens generally.

Occasionally this bird shows well in more open habitat, enabling us to get a much-prized view of its movements. It will emerge to feed on hawthorn berries usually in November before they are stripped by fieldfares or redwings. It did this to the delight of some RSPB Macclesfield Local Group members in heavy rain at Cromford (Derbyshire) in November 1992. Occasionally it appears in upper branches of hornbeams - an uncommon tree which it favours. Treasure such sightings - they will not occur often.

Recent survey results suggest that nationally the Hawfinch is in decline as a resident bird - more frequent records of it this winter are due probably to dedicated birdwatching based on good local knowledge and possible increase in migrant Hawfinches from Europe. I have seen this bird only three times - twice at Cromford and once at Eccleston (Cheshire). I know of no records of it in the Macclesfield area. (Ed. If you know otherwise, please inform us). Some Group members have seen it in a churchyard in North Wales; some may see it near Leighton Moss. It is also reported in winter from Clumber Park (Nottinghamshire).

Unobliging as this mega-finch is often found to be, it rightly claims charisma and panache as it is good looking, scarce and a challenge - rather in the same way as the elusive European Wall Creeper. Though difficult, trying to track down the handsome Hawfinch can be well worth the effort - you may be disappointed, but don't give up on it!

Ralph L.Cole

VISIT BY LOCAL GROUP TO LEIGHTON MOSS & WOODWELL (CUMBRIA) 26TH MARCH 2006

Target birds were hawfinch, avocet, marsh harrier, bittern and bearded tit, (ambitious maybe, - but if you don't try?).

Despite the loss of an hour's sleep, (British Summer Time!!), a small gathering left the Duke St. car park to rendezvous with others at the Leighton Moss RSPB site. On the recommendation of Ian, and before unloading the cars, we elected to go first to Woodwell in search of the elusive hawfinch. As the name suggests, Woodwell is a local woodland area only a few minutes drive from the reserve. Leaving the cars in the small parking area, we set off for an enjoyable 40 / 50 minute circular walk, but despite a sightings tally of a dozen or so woodland species including jay and nuthatch, there were alas, no hawfinch to be seen.

After this not unexpected disappointment, our luck changed. Returning to the reserve, we "checked in," and set off for the hides, pausing at the feeder station, and there got our first surprise of the day. When did you last see a treecreeper on a feeder? Moving on to the

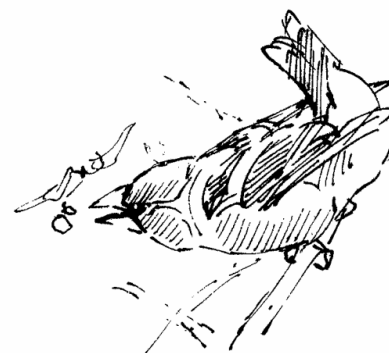
"Grisedale Hide", we were rewarded by excellent views of one of our target birds quartering the reed bed, marsh harrier (male).

Returning to the "Lillian Hide", we had lunch, and then re-grouped to move on to the "Public Hide", where not only were we treated to clear views of a perched marsh harrier, (female or possibly juvenile), but were further delighted to see (that sometimes heard but rarely seen) heron, the bittern in flight. Our second target bird of the day, and not just a fleeting glimpse.

Finally we took to the cars again, and headed round to the "Eric Morecombe" and "Allen" hides, and it was from the "Eric Morecombe" hide that we got not only our third target bird, the avocet, but also our second surprise of the day, an (early?), osprey, perched on a post, offering clear views before lazily flying off. (Note! An osprey sighting had been reported on the 23rd).

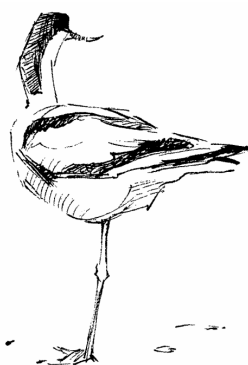
A total of 52 species were recorded on the day, (see list), and good day's birding was enjoyed by all. As ever, our thanks to Ian (and Lydia), for pioneering the Woodwell site on the previous weekend.

Gordon Howard



Hawfinch by J Busby

Avocet J Busby



BARN OWL BREEDING SUCCESS IN CHESHIRE

Barn owl breeding has been a remarkable success in Cheshire with seven pairs raising seventeen young in 1998 increasing to 123 pairs raising 316 young by 2005.

Year	Pairs	Young
1998	7	17
1999	10	32
2000	19	46
2001	29	53
2002	48	110
2003	61	167
2004	76	199
2005	123	316

Of the 123 pairs 47 used nest boxes in trees, 10 used nest boxes in barns, 30 used nest boxes on poles, 9 in buildings without boxes and 27 were in natural tree sites.

The newly-formed South East Cheshire Barn Owl Group have been receiving records and sightings of barn owls and requests for nest boxes in the Macclesfield area. Last Sunday a couple of members of the Mid Cheshire Group came to Macclesfield and demonstrated how and where to put up boxes and three were put up in suitable sites in the area. There are still more boxes to be made and sited, and if anybody is interested in helping, has sightings or would be interested in a box on their land please contact barnowls@natureuk.co.uk or phone Ray Evans 01625 432635 or David Tolliday 01625 432105.



Did You Know?

Redwings are true nomads - birds ringed in the UK were found as far away as Iran and Georgia the following year.

Have a fun day out—take part in the Wilmslow Guild Bird Race
June 4th 8.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.
Optional buffet afterwards
Contact Trisha Thompson 01625 526546

CAN YOU HELP?

'RIOT OF SPRING' at Pikelow Farm on Saturday 29th April 2006.

Can you help on the day or supply goods for this event?

We need:

Assistance with catering and serving afternoon teas.

Help on stalls selling plants, RSPB goods and bird food.

Plants, cuttings, flowers etc. for plant stall.

Cakes, biscuits, scones, jams etc to sell or serve!

If you are willing to do some baking, please contact Trisha Thompson on 01625 526546
and/or if you can help on the day, please contact Ray Evans on 01625 432635

Please pass on a copy of this newsletter to any member or non-member of the Group that you know who may be interested

Health and Safety

In the event of fire or other emergency necessitating evacuation of the building, please leave in an orderly manner via the nearest available Emergency Exit or as instructed by a designated Committee member. Emergency Exits, indicated by the internationally recognised symbol of a 'running man' on a green background, are situated through the door at the rear of the hall either straight down the corridor or directly on the right through the main entrance with further exits to the right and through the door to the left of the stage.

If required, there is a first aid kit in the kitchen off the entrance corridor. (If you do have an accident, however minor, while here tonight please report it directly to a Committee member who, amongst other things, will ensure that details are logged in the Accident Report Book.)

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Macclesfield Local Group

FOR YOUR DIARY

- Sat 29 Apr 2006 **Special Event** – RIOT OF SPRING at Pikelow Farm, School Lane, Marton. 2.00pm to 5.00pm
National Garden Scheme Event supported by The RSPB, Macclesfield Local Group who will be providing afternoon teas and plants for sale. Come and experience the kaleidoscopic display of pansies and wallflowers and then walk the farm trail to see the plethora of wild flowers.
Enquiries: David Taylor 01260 224231
- Sun 30 Apr 2006 **Outdoor Meeting** – CANNOCK CHASE
In search of woodlark and spring migrants.
Depart at 8.00 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip.
Leader: Hugo Charlton Jones 01204 415200 or 07949 022986
- Tues 2 May 2006 **Showing Birds to People** – WINGS OVER WILMSLOW
Discover the bird life around Lindow Common and Moss with MBC Ranger, Paul Hughes. 6.30 pm - 8.00 pm.
Meet at Lindow Common Car Park opposite the Boddington Arms, Racecourse Road, Wilmslow (SJ834814)
Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
- Thur 4 May 2006 **Showing Birds to People** – BOLLINGTON'S BIRDS
A morning walk along the Middlewood Way and Macclesfield Canal looking for summer migrants with MBC Ranger, Paul Hughes. 8.00 am - 10.30 am.
Meet at Adlington Road Car Park, Bollington (SJ930781) WC
Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
- Sun 7 May 2006 **Outdoor Meeting** – WOOLSTON EYES
An invitation to see black-necked grebes and other breeding birds.
Depart at 8.00 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip.
Leader: Ray Evans 01625 432635 (*Please note change of leader*)
- Sun 7 May 2006 **CWT Event** – THE CARRS ENVIRONMENTAL EXTRAVAGANZA
12.00 am – 4.00 pm at The Carrs, Wilmslow
Come and meet birds of prey, newts, bees and much more. FREE entry.
Enquiries: Neil Savage 01625 523735
- Tue 9 May 2006 **Showing Birds to People** – TEGG'S NOSE
A morning walk in the woodland and scrub looking for pied flycatchers and redstarts with MBC Ranger, Paul Hughes. 8.00 am - 10.30 am
Meet at Tegg's Nose Reservoir Car Park, Langley (SJ945718)
Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
- Tue 9 May 2006 **Indoor Meeting** – AGM followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES
Each year our members produce some fine slides depicting wildlife both at home and abroad, so do come and support the evening and bring up to 25 of your own slides, digital images or a short video.
- Thur 11 May 2006 **Showing Birds to People** – DAWN CHORUS AT THE COPPICE
A chance to brush up on your birdsong or just simply enjoy it with MBC Ranger Pete Dowse. 6.00 am - 8.00 am
Meet at Poynton Coppice Car Park, Shrigley Road, Higher Poynton (SJ942826)
Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
- Sun 14 May 2006 **Coach Trip** – ANGLESEY
Depart at 7.30 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow
Contact Tom Gibbons 01625 520317 or Trish Thompson 01625 526546 to secure your place.
- Tues 16 May 2006 **Evening Walk** – ALDERLEY EDGE WOODS
Looking for wood warbler and early summer migrants. 6.30 pm - 8.30 pm
Meet at the NT Car Park, Nr. The Wizard Restaurant (SJ859773) WC
Leader: Rob Cameron 01625 619861
- Fri 19 May 2006 **Weekend Away** – PEMBROKESHIRE
to
Sun 21 May 2006 Based in Haverfordwest with a planned excursion by boat to Skomer on Saturday for chough, guillemot, razorbill and puffin.
Contact: Ian Taylor 01260 275248

- Thur 25 May 2006 **Showing Birds to People – RIVERSIDE PARK, MACCLESFIELD**
 Meet in the Car Park off Manchester Road near the Audi garage at 10.30 am for a leisurely stroll looking for summer visitors. Finish at 12 noon. WC
 Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
- Wed 31 May 2006 **Evening Walk – TITTESWORTH RESERVOIR**
 Will we find any new species to add to Ray's Bird Report for 2006?
 6.30 pm - 8.30 pm. Meet at Tittesworth Reservoir Visitor Centre, Meerbrook, Nr. Leek (SJ994603) WC
 Leader: Ray Perry 01625 432668
- Sun 4 Jun 2006 **WGBG Event – WILMSLOW GUILD BIRD RACE**
 8.00 am – 2.00 pm. This team 'race' will be constrained to a 10-mile radius of Wilmslow Town Centre and will be followed by a buffet meal (optional). Nominal entry fee per person with separate charge for buffet.
 Enquiries: Trish Thompson 01625 526546
- Wed 7 Jun 2006 **Evening Walk – AROUND RINGWAY**
 A new venue to see what's breeding in Trish's tetrad.
 6.30 pm - 8.30 pm. Meet at the dead end of Lady Lane, Nr. Mobberley (SJ792810)
 Leader: Trish Thompson 01625 526546
- Thur 15 Jun 2006 **Evening Walk – LADDEREDGE COUNTRY PARK**
 A venue we haven't visited for a few years looking for summer migrants.
 6.30 pm - 8.30 pm. Meet at the Visitor Centre Car Park, off Sunnyhills Road, Leek (SJ976553)
 Leader: Tom Gibbons 01625 520317 (*Please note change of leader*)
- Sun 2 Jul 2006 **Outdoor Meeting – DELIGHTFUL DRAGONFLIES**
 On our visit to the Airport Pools we hope to see broad-bodied chasers, black-tailed skimmers and more.
 9.30 am – 3.30 pm. Bring a packed lunch.
 Meet at Lindow Common Car Park opposite Boddington Arms, Racecourse Road, Wilmslow (SJ834814) for onward travel to venue.
 Leader: Trish Thompson 01625 526546
- Fri 14 Jul 2006 **Special Event – BIG ON BEGONIAS** at Pikelow Farm, School Lane, Marton. 6.00 pm to dusk. National Garden Scheme Event supported by The RSPB, Macclesfield Local Group who will be providing refreshments and plants for sale. Come and see breathtaking cascades of flowers in a myriad of colours. WC
 Enquiries: David Taylor 01260 224231
- Sun 10 Sep 2006 **Special Event – WOW 2006** at Pikelow Farm, School Lane, Marton. 10.00 am – 4.00 pm. A repeat of our very successful Wildlife and Outdoor World Extravaganza last held in 2004. WC
 Enquiries: David Taylor 01260 224231
- Tue 12 Sep 2006 **Indoor Meeting – MILLENIUM WILDLIFE** by Paul Hobson
- Tue 10 Oct 2006 **Indoor Meeting – BIRD BEHAVIOUR** by Valerie MacFarland
- Tue 14 Nov 2006 **Indoor Meeting – THE ARCTIC SUMMER OF GREENLAND AND SPITZBERGEN** by Gordon Yates



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www.macclesfieldrspb.org.uk