



for birds
for people
for ever

The
Heron



Newsletter - December 2006

A SEASONAL MESSAGE FROM YOUR CHAIRMAN AND COMMITTEE

At this festive time your Committee joins me in thanking you all for the support that you have given over the past twelve months to The RSPB, your local Group and, of course, its Officers and Committee. Without your continued encouragement, goodwill and, in many cases, unstinting effort, it would have been impossible to achieve all that we have over the past twelve months. It is really heartening to see so many new faces at our Meetings and we hope that all members, old and new, will continue working together to promote the Group and its activities to the benefit of birds and the environment. As well as our regular Indoor and Outdoor Meetings, we have many other events planned during the second-half of our 2006 – 2007 Season, the first of which is 'Big Garden Birdwatch' at Pikelow Farm on Sunday, 28 January. We hope that you will continue to come along to such events because their success is dependent upon your support. Until then it only remains for us to wish all members and friends of The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group.

'A Very Merry Christmas and A Happy and Prosperous New Year'.

FOR YOUR DIARY

DECEMBER 2006

Until 31 December 2006	<i>Special Event:</i> FROM MOORLANDS TO SHORELANDS Birdlife in the Art of Charles Tunnicliffe RA (1901 – 1979) at West Park Museum, Prestbury Road, Macclesfield, SK10 3BJ Daily, Tue – Sun, 1.00 pm – 4.00 pm. Details: 01625 613210
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JANUARY 2007

Friday, 5 January	<i>CAWOS:</i> BIRDS OF A WELSH MOORLAND by John Lawton Roberts 7.45 pm at Cranford Suite, Civic Centre, Toft Road, Knutsford
Tuesday, 9 January	<i>Indoor Meeting:</i> COSTA RICA – GEM OF CENTRAL AMERICA by John Mather
Sunday, 14 January	<i>Outdoor Meeting:</i> NORTH LANCASHIRE COAST An excellent area for wintering waders and wildfowl plus possible wind-blown sea birds. Depart at 9.00 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip. Leader: Graham Palmer 01625 420179
Thursday, 25 January	<i>Showing Birds to People:</i> RIVERSIDE PARK, MACCLESFIELD Meet in the Car Park off Manchester Road (near the Audi garage) at 10.00 am for a leisurely stroll birding along the River Bollin. Finish at 12.00 am. Leader: Ray Evans 01625 432635
Sunday, 28 January	<i>National RSPB Event:</i> BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH Join with the RSPB Wildlife Explorers for a birdwatching event at Pikelow Farm, School Lane, Marton. Grid Ref. SJ856690. 10.00 am – 12.30 pm. Contact: David Tolliday 01625 432105

FEBRUARY 2007

Friday, 2 February	<i>CAWOS:</i> THE RIVER by Paul Hobson 7.45 pm at Cranford Suite, Civic Centre, Toft Road, Knutsford
Wednesday, 7 February	<i>CWT:</i> THE WOODLAND TRUST by Antony Bonehill 7.30 pm at St John's Church Hall, Earlsway, Macclesfield
Tuesday, 13 February	<i>Indoor Meeting:</i> FIFTY YEARS OF BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY by Clifford Heyes



Saturday, 17 February to Sunday, 18 February
Short Weekend Away: **TEESSIDE**

Dear Friends,

I never cease to be amazed by birds and their behaviour. At last month's Indoor Meeting, we marvelled at Gordon Yates' film sequence showing a huge flock of lapwing on the corrugated roof of a superstore in Rochdale. What were they doing and why were they there? A very plausible answer appeared in a recent article in The Times that suggests that the birds have found that it is safer and more productive to roost during the day and feed in the fields at night. If they feed during daylight hours, the lapwings are constantly harassed by black-headed gulls attempting to steal the worms that they dig up. However, this situation does not occur at night as the gulls tend to roost on water. Interestingly, this phenomenon has been noted to occur mainly in the North of England where the lapwings are joined sometimes by golden plovers.

If you have great spotted woodpeckers regularly visiting your garden, the BTO would like to hear from you. It appears that great spotted woodpeckers just love peanuts (83% of birds regularly visiting gardens fed on these) and, once parent birds have found a reliable source, they will bring their young to take full advantage of this 'fast-food' outlet. It is believed that by doing so they save valuable foraging time.

It has been shown recently that the song of many birds in an urban environment is faster and the pitch is higher than that of their rural relatives. This appears to be an adaptation to cope with low-pitch noise pollution resulting mainly from traffic. Is it nature or nurture at work? Probably a combination of both but only time will tell.

The Group has already made a considerable financial contribution to the 'Peak Birds Project' but, if we are to continue to 'Give Peak Birds a Chance', we need to provide some practical help as well. Dave Tolliday, in his article 'Please Help Our Local Birds' shows how, with a little effort, we could make a huge difference. Why not consider using your birdwatching skills to benefit the birds as well as providing you with many hours of enjoyment and healthy exercise?

Ray Evans

NEUMANN'S & ASHTON'S FLASHES, SUNDAY 26TH NOVEMBER

Despite the indifferent weather forecast, the cloud was clearing as we approached Northwich for an outing led by Trisha Thompson. As we pulled into the lay-by the sun was coming out and a flock of Long-tailed Tits flew across the road and landed in the hedgerow. Eleven of us set off to the viewpoint overlooking Neumann's Flash where a large mixed group of Lapwing and Golden Plover were feeding. Out on the deeper water were several Shoveler, Tufted Duck and Teal. The Plovers seemed a bit jumpy and every so often they took to the air en masse. Sure enough, we spotted a Sparrowhawk passing overhead and later on 3 Buzzards came for a circle round. We moved round to the hide for some excellent close views of the Lapwing and Golden Plovers as well as a couple of Dunlin feeding amongst them. The sun was warm now and a Song Thrush was singing away as we moved on over the footbridge towards Haydn's Pool. There were a few Fieldfare and Redwing making the most of the berries and we had good clear views of a Buzzard perched in a tree. Haydn's Pool itself was almost devoid of birdlife, possibly due to the clearance work that had recently been carried out there.



On through the woods we went hoping to see, or at least hear, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. No luck, but we did see Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker as well as several Nuthatch, Treecreeper and a variety of Tits plus a late Blackcap which Trisha caught a glimpse of. We continued to Budworth Mere for more Teal, Mallard, Wigeon, Pochard, Gadwall and Goosander. It was while I was scanning through the scope that a Kingfisher flashed into view and I followed it into the trees on the far side. Unfortunately, the rest of the group had already moved on by then but the Kingfisher obligingly flew back across the water while we were looking out from the hide.

We heard reports of a Pintail back at Neumann's Flash and Graham sent a message to say that he had seen it, so after a bite of lunch, we headed back that way taking in Ashton's Flash en route. There were still plenty of Lapwing and Golden Plover around as well as a few Shelduck and the Dunlin, but we couldn't see the Pintail. By now the sun was getting low, so we called it a day. All in all an excellent day's birding with 59 species in total, (view the full list on the website), and it would have been 60 had we tracked down that elusive Pintail!

RED ALERT !!!

A robin, which had been foraging for dropped nuts beneath a feeder, suddenly flew up and attacked a great spotted woodpecker on the feeder. Presumably it was aggravated by the red beneath the woodpecker's tail. However, the woodpecker was unconcerned and continued feeding.

Clare Mortin

SAVE YOUR STAMPS AND HELP TO 'SAVE THE ALBATROSS'

In the excitement of opening your Christmas cards this year please don't forget that, simply by saving the stamps, you can help to 'Save the Albatross'. Why not leave yourself a reminder to save the stamps from all the mail you receive? However, please don't try to remove stamps from envelopes as this could damage them. Nevertheless, if you wish to help, we would be most grateful if you could carefully trim around each stamp or group of stamps to leave a ¼ inch margin of envelope on all sides. Furthermore, we will be even more pleased if you are prepared to sort your stamps into the following three categories, Foreign, British commemoratives (special e.g. Christmas) and British definitives (non-pictorial). Following our recent appeal for help with trimming and sorting of stamps, we wish to thank Tony Icke and Ruth Markwick for coming forward with offers of assistance. Remember, all proceeds from the sale by The RSPB of collected stamps will go to help 'Save the Albatross'.

PLEASE HELP OUR LOCAL BIRDS

We all enjoy going out birdwatching and walking in the countryside. However, how much good does this do for the local environment and the birds that we enjoy watching? Is there more we could do for our local environment and wildlife? We do not have a local reserve in Macclesfield where we could help The RSPB. However there are other opportunities for volunteering to help the organisation that does so much for our countryside.

At the current time there are two projects underway, for which The RSPB needs our help.

LAPWINGS, CURLEWS AND SNIPE

In 2001/2002 a survey of the Peak District was undertaken by volunteers to locate breeding lapwing, curlew and snipe. The results of these surveys helped prioritise conservation work with farmers and landowners in the Peak District. Our 2006 Wildlife and Outdoor World event raised over £5,000 for the Peak Birds Project and we have also donated another £2,000 to this project. A repeat of the original survey is to be undertaken in the spring of 2007 and The RSPB needs our help to undertake this survey. The survey areas local to Macclesfield are based around Lyme Park, Kettleshulme, Burbage, Lamaload, Withenshaw, Crag Hall and Danebridge. The surveys will require just three random visits through the breeding season (April to June inclusive) to record the numbers of lapwing, curlew and snipe. The surveys will be carried out from public footpaths, public roads and access land, so no engagement with farmers or landowners will be required by the surveyor.



Curlew by Langman

TREE SPARROWS

Our 2004 Wildlife and Outdoor World event raised over £4,500 for Operation Tree Sparrow. This Project provides nest boxes and winter feeding stations on 41 farms in Lancashire, Cheshire, Merseyside and Greater Manchester to help tree sparrows, a species that has declined by over 95% in the last 30 years. This project is still ongoing and The RSPB need more volunteers to help with monitoring the farms.

The surveys are needed in winter to see what birds are visiting the feeding stations and in the spring and summer to check what birds are using the nest boxes.

There are two farms where there is a desperate need for help. These are Yeowood Farm, Ettiley Heath, Sandbach and Heathfield Farm, Oakhangar, Crewe. Both of the farmers put out the bird food, but volunteers are needed to monitor the birds.

In addition there are other farms in the Macclesfield area where our help is required.

A PLEA FOR HELP

The Macclesfield RSPB Local Group has already done a lot for these projects by donating over £11,500 since 2004. But we can do more. Please put a purpose to your birdwatching and trips into the countryside by volunteering to help The RSPB with these surveys. No special skills or knowledge are required, just a willingness to do something for the birds that need our help. If need be it is possible that the survey areas could be shared.

If you would like to be involved please contact David Tolliday 01625 432105 or Rob Cameron 01625 619861 or email

ARIZONA BIRDING HIGHLIGHTS

After last September's article about my trip to Arizona, a number of members asked what else we saw apart from Hummingbirds.

Altogether, we actually saw 199 species (a round 200 if we counted the Pelicans we saw as we approached the airport at Salt Lake City!!).

Many of these birds were very special, of course, because of the area's close proximity to the Mexican border and numerous species were seen which only just creep across the border into the USA - indeed many USA birders go there for that very reason. We saw some 12 different raptors, 14 assorted waders, 7 woodpeckers, 16 flycatchers and 7 different owls, including the delightful Elf Owl, reputedly the smallest in the world. Then we saw the Greater Roadrunner- a bird everyone wanted to see.

We were also treated to the tremendous scenery of canyons, scrub desert and mountains. This was "Cowboys & Indians" country, the homeland of the Apaches. We also took time out to walk down the main street of Tombstone and the scene of the famous gunfight at the OK Corral. We also had lunch in an incredible art deco hotel on the Mexican border where the infamous bandit Pancho Villa rode his horse into the hotel lobby as a mark of defiance.

A holiday of many great memories- wonderful birds, beautiful scenery and some great experiences.

Tom Gibbons

The weather forecast was for gale force winds and rain, but nevertheless members of the Macclesfield Local Group were amongst the 38 brave souls turned up for the Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Society coach trip.

As we arrived in Southport it was bright and sunny, if a little chilly for those of us stupid enough to be fooled into not putting on our coats, as we stopped to take a look at the boating lake. There was nothing unusual on the lake except a black swan with the geese and gulls. Perhaps the recent weather had not been bad enough to bring in divers or sea ducks, but as we drove along the coast to Marshside it looked exceedingly rough and hostile out to sea. You could not imagine anything wanting to stay out there.

Suitably clad at Marshside we were soon notching up pink-footed geese, shelduck and waders on the shoreline and skylarks, meadow pipits and linnets, battling against the wind. A surprise was a covey of grey partridge which as they rose, were speedily blown out of sight. In front of the hides, ducks shone in the sunshine, beautiful wigeon as far as the eye could see, smart pintail and pretty little teal. Black-tailed godwits are always spectacular along with the golden plover and lapwings with their metallic looking plumage shining beautifully in the sun. An odd grey plover was picked out with 2 skulking snipe behind, a water rail was seen by a few and there was a sighting of a short-eared owl.



Pintail by Langman

Around lunch time we set off for Martin Mere, passing 4 or 5 little egrets on the marsh and a field full of pink-footed geese, at least 1000 I would estimate. We spent the afternoon at this always pleasant to visit reserve. It's amazing how a coach full of people can get lost, I hardly bumped into anyone all afternoon; the hides were comparatively empty as was the café. Where was everyone? I wondered if they had all hidden away in the coach but this was vehemently denied.

Despite the weather deteriorating and the winds reaching gale force by the end of the afternoon, a good number of birds were seen, even a buzzard and a kestrel, remarkably. There were a few goldeneye amongst the numerous ducks, and 9 ruff were squabbling over the food, one especially being really aggressive.

Whilst watching the swan feeding at 3.30 we were informed that 1200 whooper swans were on the reserve this year, but only 3 Bewicks had been seen. Twenty or thirty years ago, equal numbers of these two species arrived each year at this site, but since then there has been a steady increase in whooper swan numbers and simultaneously, a decrease in Bewick's. It is not understood completely why this is so, but one theory is that because the Bewick's are smaller and more timid, the build up of whooper numbers has made the Bewick's prefer to winter in places not dominated by whoopers and so they have taken to other wintering grounds. Another reason could be that as winters are becoming milder, the Bewick's, being a smaller bird, are choosing to stay in Holland rather than expending energy crossing the North Sea to Britain. This also means that they do not have as far to travel back to their breeding grounds. Either way, it is good that the decline in numbers at

Martin Mere does not indicate a world decline in numbers of Bewick's only a shift in habitats.

Other birds of note were 2 male great spotted woodpeckers, 10+ tree sparrows on the feeders and a brambling was seen along with 12 chaffinches at one feeding station.

Normally I take little notice of the captive birds at Martin Mere, but having just come back from Namibia where I had seen hundreds of flamingoes in the wild, I stood and watched the captive ones for a while. I was amazed to see them displaying to each other, head turning in a way very similar to great crested grebes. I had not seen this in Namibia as they were too busy feeding, it was fascinating to watch.

By the time we left the weather was really wild. It was nice to be able to warm up over a hot cup of tea and cake in the café, before we set off at 4.30, arriving in Wilmslow an hour later, everyone having enjoyed the day, despite the weather.

Trisha Thompson

CHARITY CARD SHOPS: THANKS

The Group Leader and Committee wish to thank all members and friends of the Group who helped on our allotted days at the Charity Card Shops at Knutsford Heritage Centre and Macclesfield and Wilmslow Libraries. Furthermore, we are most grateful to Chris Revett, Joan Wilson, Jennifer Tolliday, Trish Thompson and Jean Gibbons who have looked after our interests at these venues and replenished the stock on a regular basis.

We are indebted also to the many other members and friends of the Group who have assisted with RSPB Sales at Charity Fairs and other events during recent months.

Let's be 'green' this Christmas by recycling our cards and real trees?

The Woodland Trust are encouraging us to recycle our Christmas cards so, on Twelfth Night, or earlier, when you come to take down your Christmas decorations, please remember to save your cards for recycling. As in previous years, there will be collection boxes at all Tesco and W H Smith stores throughout January. For your convenience, at our January Indoor Meeting only, we will have a collection box available where you can deposit your cards, which we will take for recycling.

Don't forget also that, if you have a real Christmas tree this year, for a small donation in aid of East Cheshire Hospice, you can arrange for it to be collected and recycled. For more details and to book a collection visit www.echtrees.co.uk. Please note that this service is available in the following postcode areas only: SK9, SK10, SK11, SK12 and WA16.