



for birds
for people
for ever

The Heron



Newsletter - October 2006

FOR YOUR DIARY

Now on until 31 Dec 2006	Special Event: 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, 1.30 pm – 4.30 pm until 31 Oct 2006 and then 1.00 pm – 4.00 pm until the end of the year. Details: 01625 613210
Sunday, 15 October	WGBG Coach Trip: SPURN Depart at 7.30 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow.
Sunday, 22 October	Outdoor Meeting: WOOD LANE NATURE RESERVE, ELLESMERE A relatively new wetland reserve with an impressive bird list. Depart at 8.00 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip Leader: Ian Taylor 01260 275248
Saturday, 28 October	National RSPB Event: FEED THE BIRDS DAY Please see below
Sunday, 29 October	Working Party: MIDDLEWOOD WAY Contact Rob Cameron 01625 619861 for details.
Wednesday, 1 November	CWT: MY LOCAL WILDLIFE by David Tolliday 7.30 pm at St John's Church Hall, Earlsay, Macclesfield
Friday, 3 November	CAWOS: BIRDING LA MANCHA AND EXTREMADURA by Allan and Susan Parker 7.45 pm at Cranford Suite, Civic Centre, Toft Road, Knutsford
Tuesday, 14 November	Indoor Meeting: BIRD HABITATS OF THE PENNINES AND SCOTLAND by Gordon Yates
Sunday, 19 November	WGBG Coach Trip: ATTENBOROUGH NATURE RESERVE Depart at 8.00 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow

FEED THE BIRDS DAY

This year we will be celebrating 'Feed the Birds Day' on Saturday, 28th October with two events at Bollington Arts Centre.

Why not join our RSPB Wildlife Explorers between 2.00 pm and 4.00 pm for a fun afternoon making interesting and exciting foods for the birds?

If that doesn't appeal, why not join us at 7.30 pm for 'Birds on Film', a chance to see some of the latest RSPB films celebrating special birds and their unique habitats including 'The Undiscovered Country' depicting the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland and its wildlife plus a brand new film by Peak Productions, an independent production company, entitled 'Birds of Scotland'.

Tickets (Adults £3.50, Children £1.50) are available at our Indoor Meetings or by post from Graham Palmer, 8 Rydal Place, Macclesfield, SK11 7XU. Cheques should be made payable to The RSPB, Macclesfield Local Group. If applying by post, please send a stamped SAE or arrange to collect tickets on the door.

CHAT FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends,

Our Treasurer has finally emerged from his 'counting house' to reveal that *WOW 2006* raised in excess of £5,000. These funds will be donated to The RSPB to help 'Give Peak Birds a Chance' through 'The Peak Birds Project' and other initiatives for securing the habitats that our moorland birds need for their long-term survival. Thanks again to everyone who made *WOW 2006* such a success. It has been a tremendous all-round effort.

The 2006 breeding season has been one of mixed fortunes for our birdlife here in the UK. Corncrake numbers in Scotland have reached a 28-year high thanks to the RSPB conservation programme started in 1993. However, we must not be complacent, as further proposed changes to agricultural support schemes may still jeopardise this conservation success story. (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/scotland/action/28yearhigh.asp>)

Little egrets have bred in London for the first time in over a century. Their original extinction in Britain was almost certainly the result of the Victorians' insatiable demand for egret plumes to adorn their hats. This slaughter of little egrets was one of the impetuses that led to the formation in 1889 of an embryonic society that eventually became The RSPB. The species began breeding again in the UK only a decade ago after colonising parts of the south coast and from this base have gradually moved north. Only this weekend I counted at least 100 little egrets at a high tide roost in North Wales. (<http://www.24dash.com/content/news/viewNews.php?navID=58&newsID=11203>)

By contrast, barn owls have had their worst breeding season for 20 years according to some experts. This has been due mainly to adverse climatic conditions at critical times in the season. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/devon/5377222.stm>). Some seabirds have fared little better with hundreds of dead and starving guillemots being found around the coastline of Scotland and Northern Ireland as a result of a drastic decline in the numbers of sandeels, their staple diet. (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/action/guillemots.asp>)

We can only guess at how much 'climate change' is to blame for these particular breeding failures but there is no doubt that profound alterations are occurring in marine and other ecosystems.

We reported in our September Newsletter a higher than normal mortality in mainly young greenfinches, chaffinches and house sparrows due to trichomoniasis, a parasitic infection affecting the birds' ability to eat and breathe. Thanks to all of you who have contacted us to report cases in your area. Your reports have been passed on via the RSPB to those involved in the Garden Bird Health Initiative (GBHi), the body that is monitoring the problem. Hopefully, the incidences of infection will decline with the onset of colder winter weather as they did last year. In the meantime, if you encounter dead or dying birds in your garden, we can only reiterate our previous recommendations to stop all feeding of birds for an initial period of two weeks and to thoroughly clean and disinfect all feeders, birdtables and other feeding surfaces. Please be assured that your garden birds will not starve as there is an abundance of food for them in the hedgerows and their chances of contracting the infection will be reduced considerably by avoiding the inevitable concentrations of birds that congregate at feeders.

Ray Evans

Ray Evans

JEWELS IN THE MOUNTAINS

Three other Macclesfield Group members joined others and myself on a wonderful trip to the mountains of SE Arizona. This was the land of Apache Indians, Chief Cochise and Tombstone, home of the OK Corral - we actually had fun walking down the main-street imagining the famous gunfight.

But we were there for the amazing reputation the area has for birdwatching, not just numerically but because the region enjoys visits from many rare birds from across the Mexican border - birds which are not seen anywhere else in the States. Our trip was greatly enhanced by the skills of our local guides, Rick and Barbara.

Firstly, I did not have any accurate mental picture of the geography of the area and I confess that the mountains were a surprise. But more surprised by the number of hummingbirds (or hummers as the locals refer to them) and that they concentrated their visits to the higher levels, above 5000'. It really is an incredible sight to watch numerous hummingbirds feeding on special sugar-water feeders which are put up by many locals. Their size is so tiny and they buzz to and fro extracting as much glucose as possible to supply their energy requirements. But it is also their colours. They are very gaudy but beautiful birds and sometimes you are startled by their beauty. Occasionally, the males appear relatively plain until they flare the throat feathers and a vivid emerald green or scarlet or blue or gold flashes. Overall, we saw 14 different species of hummingbird, all vying for the title of the most handsome. Marvellous birds, beautiful birds - living jewels of the mountains.

Tom Gibbons

HOW MANY BIRDS?

How many species of bird are there in the world? Well, some say it is about 10,400 but who knows? Well, actually, no-one really knows the accurate figure because as soon as a writer puts the number into print, scientists or "administrators" change it due to splits ie when sub-species become species in their own right.

This came into focus with me twice recently. Firstly, on my recent trip to South Africa when the ID book I bought detailed the fact that the Long billed Lark has now been split into 5 different species and the Clapper Lark into 3 species- oh, and the Kelp Gull had been split from the Cape Gull. Since the book's publication, the Kelp Gull and Cape Gull have been put back together as 1 species!!

The second item related to the fantastic exploits of Phoebe Snettsinger, the amazing American lady birdwatcher who became the world's leader in sighting bird species before her untimely death. However, her birdlist continues to grow and has increased by around 20 species AFTER her death because of numerous species splits.

What is going on??

I then came upon this small poem:-

Kind reader, we call to your careful attention
this wonderful growth of modern invention.
Lord knows where we'll end if this craze increases
such a trotting out yearly of created sub-species.

This succinctly puts what I feel. But this is not a poem just written to describe current events, it was actually published in a bird magazine in 1889!!

Tom Gibbons

THERE'S NOTHING ON THE TELE!

Would you like to do something useful instead of falling asleep in front of the box, and at the same time raise money for the RSPB?

A useful source of fundraising over the years has been the collection of used postage stamps by our members. The RSPB, Macclesfield Local Group has been prominent in sending many hundreds of thousands to Head Office and these are sold on to collectors.

One of our most reliable and productive trimmers and sorters, Mrs Rickman, has recently retired at the grand old age of 95 and we are most grateful for her efforts over a long period.

If you feel you would like to help out with this simple task, please contact Ray Evans (01625 432635) or me (01625 874604).

Please do keep the stamps coming from home and business, as well as any unwanted collections or accumulations.

Thanking you in anticipation

Robin Corlett

ALTERNATIVE 'GARDEN' BIRD LIST

January - Pulmonaria "Redstart"
February - Crocus "Snow Bunting"
March - Narcissus "Jack Snipe"
April - Rhododendron "Curlew"
May - Parrot Tulips
June - Day Lily "Jenny Wren"
July - Rose "Goldfinch"
August - Penstemon "Raven"
September - Ragged Robin
October - Dahlia "Yellowhammer"
November and December - no sightings!

Jean Gibbons

**YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO SELECT EARLY FROM OUR GREAT RANGE OF RSPB CHRISTMAS CARDS,
CALENDARS AND NOVELTY ITEMS**

Why not save postage by buying your Christmas goods at one of the events below or by ordering in advance at one of our Indoor Meetings? Alternatively, you can call Chris Revett, our Sales Officer on 01625 426967, who will be pleased to take your order.

Combined Charities Christmas Card Shops

Oct 28 – Dec 9: Wilmslow Library

Nov 4 – Dec 9: Macclesfield Library

Nov 18 – Dec 9: Knutsford Heritage Centre

Sat 11 Nov 31st Annual Charities Bazaar

Senior Citizens' Hall, Duke Street Car Park, Macclesfield 10.00 am – 2.30 pm.

WILMSLOW GUILD BIRDWATCHING GROUP BIRD RACE 2006

On Sunday 4th June, eight teams of four people joined in the WBG bird race, which started at 8.00 am at any place chosen by the team. Most teams were Guild members, but Stockport and Macclesfield RSPB Local Groups also fielded a team or two. The aim was to see as many species of birds as possible in the given time of five-and-a-half hours, and within the area defined on a map – approximately ten mile radius of Wilmslow.

The day dawned fine and bright as teams made their way to their meeting and start points. My team chose to start at Teggs Nose to get woodland species as early as possible, and several other teams had the same idea. As we pulled into the car park, two other teams were there and Tom Gibbons' car was parked but the team was nowhere to be seen. The rules were that observation and recording must not start until 8.00 am – I hope that they were not bending the rules!!!!!!

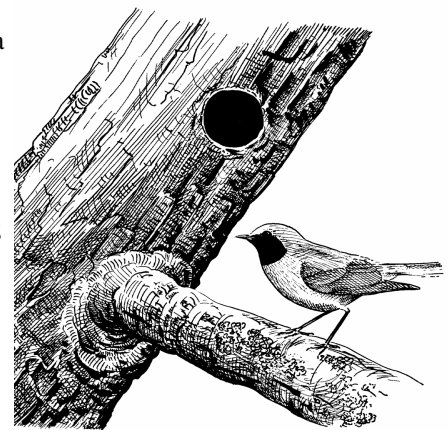
The Stockport team started from a completely different direction, covering Carrington Moss, the Shell pool, Rostherne Mere, Alderley Edge and finishing at Catchpenny Pool, Chelford. A Macclesfield team chose to stay around the Etherow, Poynton and the Lyme Park area, so when we met back at the Guild (phew, my team just made it with a second to spare), it was very interesting to find that all teams had different species on their lists.

The winning team was Stockport, lead by Peter Hugo, with sixty-nine species, helped by the black-necked grebe, yellow wagtail and lesser whitethroat found in the Carrington area, and a raven at Catchpenny Pool. Three teams found a sedge warbler; two teams found a common sandpiper; one team found a dipper; another, a wheatear; and one, a goshawk. My team saw three little owls, and Ray Evans' team found mandarin duck.

A thoroughly enjoyable morning was had by all. Afterwards, we retired to a member's house, where lunch had been prepared by Jean Gibbons, Pam Woollen, and me. It was a lovely day, and the highs and lows of the morning were discussed over a wee dram and a good meal.

A special thanks to my team for their good humour and bravery whilst I raced round the lanes of Gawsworth and Chelford, screaming to a halt when someone shouted 'Shelduck in a field'. However, we did come second with 68 species seen thanks to David Taylor's farm, which provided tree sparrows and red-legged partridge; also redstart and spotted flycatcher at Teggs Nose and a beautiful kingfisher at Bottoms Reservoir.

Nobody ticked the nutcracker on the list (just kidding) and the final total number seen by all on the day was 88 species— what a good effort and a fun day out.



Redstart by Langman

Trisha Thompson

GROUP WEEKENDS AWAY

Detailed information on this season's 'Weekends Away' was distributed to members as an insert along with 'The Heron' Magazine and Membership Renewal Forms. We are going for a 'Short Weekend' to **Teesside** in February and to **Southwest Cumbria** in May for our main 'Weekend Away'.

If you wish to join us, please ensure that we receive your booking along with a deposit of £20 per person by 31 October. Regrettably, this early deadline is necessary to secure our hotel accommodation. Please contact one of the following for further details or to make a booking: Tom Gibbons 01625 520317 (Teesside) or Graham Palmer 01625 420179 (Southwest Cumbria).

THE VALUE OF RECORDS AND DESCRIPTIONS

A plea from the County Recorder

Perhaps I should start with a quick introduction, my name is Hugh Pulsford, I've been a keen birdwatcher all my life, "man and boy" as the expression goes, and as well as watching them, I have often been involved in the record side of birding, whether as part of county recording organisations for the last 30 years or so, and more recently as a licensed ringer. I am currently the County Bird recorder for Cheshire and Wirral, which means I am a member of the CAWOS council and I chair the county rarity committee.

What you may well be asking am I telling you this for and why am I taking up valuable space in your excellent newsletter.

Well, many of you, I am sure keep some sort of records of one kind or another of the birds you see. These lists probably range from birds you see at your garden feeding station, birds on your local bird watching patch or local sites, birds seen on a specific trip, on a holiday, maybe even during a calendar year, and maybe a life list of all the species you have ever seen. Many I guess will now days keep those lists electronically. Some of you will have been involved in the recent Breeding and Wintering bird Atlas work for CAWOS and the Atlas project, so I would suggest that keeping records of birds you see, is actually something you do already.

But how many of you, I wonder, bother to submit your sightings to the CAWOS database, of any of the birds you see in the county, or if you come across a scarce migrant or local rarity, bother to fill out a description form and submit it to the County rarity committee.

Now when I normally throw that challenge out to a group of birdwatchers, I get a series of responses, so I'll take you through these in question and answer form to give you my perspective of records and descriptions and why they are both critical and valuable, if not essential.

Question: Why do you want a record of the birds I see? I don't find any rarities, its just local stuff.

Answer: The County database covers all species, and by being as complete as possible, will enable trends and changes in populations to be noted and monitored. Birds are key indicators of biodiversity changes, and I am sure you know of declining populations of farmland bird species and the torrid time some of our migrant species are having. Knowing our local bird populations and species helps when environmental pressure appears like new developments, road building, or planning applications to change land use. It also enables us to see which species are faring better than others and try and find out why, at a local county level. It may answer questions like why you may be seeing more Magpies, and perhaps, less Robins about.

Question: You can't be serious; you want me to send in every Robin or Magpie record of what I see in a year? That would take forever and what use will that be to the County database anyway?

Answer: If you don't keep your records on a species and sighting basis individually, then of course not (although some people do!) The key point with what I would term commoner resident species, is to perhaps list a maximum number seen at a particular site on a monthly basis, or unusually large numbers on a specific date or maybe even just comment on breeding success, or otherwise. These days there are electronic record forms, which can be down loaded, and submitted to the database compilers by e-mail as well. If you keep a diary of your sightings anyway, transferring it into a submission file at the end of the year does not take too much effort.

Question: Okay but what about summer or winter visitors, I don't really see many of them, is a single sighting of a Spotted Flycatcher or a count of screaming Swifts on one day really worth putting in?

Answer: The simple answer is Yes, migrants in general are more and more under pressure from the impact of habitat change, climate variations and competition. We need as much information as possible about our summer and winter visitors, as well as changes in local populations, eg Lapwing movements for example. With migrants that you might come across regularly, say Chiffchaff, or House Martins, it's always good to submit the first and last dates you saw them in any year, and perhaps peak numbers in any month. In some cases, with birds like Spotted Flycatcher or Yellow Wagtail, every sighting is becoming important. Also don't assume that just because it might appear to be a well-visited site, that someone else will put in the Pied flycatcher or Tree pipit records for somewhere like Teggs Nose CP. The more confirmation we have of all such species like that, the better.

Question: What about rare breeding birds, I happen to know where a pair of Hobby bred last year, but its on private land and I wouldn't want the site published in case they received unwelcome attention.

Answer: CAWOS is fully aware of the sensitivity around scarce breeding birds. Whilst we would mention in the Annual report that such species were confirmed as breeding in the county, we do not publish specific details of sites, and in addition, those who submit them have the option of keeping the detailed location confidential from CAWOS, either quoting a general area, or a larger grid reference. CAWOS does report such sightings to the National Rare Breeding Bird panel, but in a similar fashion, sometimes with specific site details withheld, and only publish details if it is sensible to do so, i.e. the breeding Black-necked Grebes at Woolston Eyes NR.

Question: Well suppose I see a bird like a Goshawk. Am I really expected to do a feather-by-feather description to get the record accepted by the County Rarity committee? It seems too much effort and I don't know whether I want someone else judging my sighting? " What gives those folks the right to say whether I saw a Goshawk or not.

Answer: The County rarity committee is made up of a number of experienced birdwatchers, taken from across the county. Their aim is the same as that of say, the British Birds Rarity Committee, but rather than reviewing records of rare birds for the UK, we operate on a local level with species which are considered scarce or unusual, often occurring only a few times a year, or less than annually in Cheshire and Wirral. The aim of reviewing county rarities is to ensure that the database and records of such sightings are as accurate as possible. That is why a description is required. It does not have to be incredibly detailed, but the key thing is to convince us that you saw the bird well enough to eliminate other confusion species and identify the bird as the species claimed. The merit is all in the description submitted, so it really is nothing personal.

Question: That's all very well, but in this case it was a brief fly by sighting, I don't think I had the bird in view for more than a minute. Presumably I would have no chance of getting such a record accepted.

Answer: In any record assessment, of course the length of time and the circumstances of the observation do matter. But provided you have seen the salient features to identify the bird and are able to describe them, then how long the bird was in view for is less relevant. However whilst you maybe happy to identify a Linnet or a Redwing from a brief view from a moving car, something like a Goshawk which will be less familiar and has commoner confusion species, does require proper identification. When we decide that a record is unacceptable, it is rarely because we think that an observer had mis-identified one species as another. Our role is to decide if the documentation provided supports the identification sufficiently to allow it to become part of the county record.

Question; I had a Wryneck in my garden in September 2002, and I submitted several notes to the address on the CAWOS website. I never heard any more, and it didn't appear in the Annual report so presumably you didn't believe me and rejected the record.

Answer: The Rarity Committee is striving to provide more feedback to observers on their records. I appreciate this may have not happened in the past, but you are more than welcome to e mail or call myself or the Secretary for information on your particular record. Also I often think the term rejection is too strong, I prefer "not proven," and that's what the role of the rarity committee is, to ensure that sightings of birds classed as county rarities were proven to occur on the dates submitted. Some records are very brief because the sighting was too, so inevitably there might be some doubt. We are keen to give feedback on records, publishing the accepted ones in the quarterly Bird News and providing personal feedback to observers of "not proven" records with reasons why. Often we will pend a record and try and get more information, maybe from a known expert with that species, because we are the first to admit we don't know it all.

So to finish, Please do submit your sightings of the birds you see to CAWOS, and if you see something unusual, again take the time to submit a description. If you are lucky enough to see a really rare bird, again descriptions for the British Birds rarity Committee should be sent to me for onward transmission to BBRC. All the information you need is on the CAWOS website www.CAWOS.org.

Thank you for your time.

A Hugh Pulsford
County Recorder Cheshire and Wirral
CAWOS
countyrec@kawos.org

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.)*