



for birds
for people
for ever

The Heron



Newsletter - April 2007

FOR YOUR DIARY

APRIL 2007

Sun 15	Outdoor Meeting: FOREST OF BOWLAND Moorland and woodland species plus raptors and passage migrants. Depart at 8.00 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip <i>Leader: Hugo Charlton-Jones 01204 415200 or 07949 022986</i>
Thu 26	Showing Birds to People: RIVERSIDE PARK, MACCLESFIELD Meet in the Car Park off Manchester Road near the Audi garage at 10.00am for a leisurely stroll looking for summer visitors. Finish at 12 noon. WC <i>Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635</i>
Sat 28	Special Event: RIOT OF SPRING at Pikelow Farm, School Lane, Marton. 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm 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. WC <i>Contact: David Taylor 01260 224231</i>
Sun 29	Coach Trip: RUTLAND WATER Depart at 7.30 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow

MAY 2007

Thu 3	Showing Birds to People: BOLLINGTON'S BIRDS An evening walk along the Middlewood Way and Macclesfield Canal looking for summer migrants with MBC Ranger, Paul Hughes. 6.30 pm – 8.00 pm Meet at Adlington Road Car Park, Bollington (SJ930781) WC <i>Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635</i>
Tue 8	Showing Birds to People: DERBYSHIRE BRIDGE A morning walk in the upper Goyt Valley looking for ring ouzel, golden plover, curlew and whinchat with MBC Rangers, Paul Hughes and Peter Dowse. 10.00 am – 12.30 pm Meet at Derbyshire Bridge Car Park, off the A537 (Macclesfield – Buxton) just past the 'Cat and Fiddle' (SK018716) <i>Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635</i>
Tue 8	Indoor Meeting: AGM followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES Each year our members produce some fine images 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

Did You Know?

Dunnocks are actually members of the accentor family, members of which are found only in Europe and Asia.

CHAT FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends,

The unusually warm dry weather that we are currently experiencing will possibly be the norm in future years if the climate change predictions delivered last week by the IPCC are to be believed. However, many other areas of the world are likely to experience either severe drought or flooding that could result in millions of people being displaced from the homelands. As well as being devastating in human terms, the effect on the world's biodiversity could be just as serious with the loss of many species of animals, birds, insects and plants that are unable to adapt to the rapidly changing climate. For example, we rely almost exclusively on bees to pollinate our fruit and other food crops. The current loss of many colonies of honeybees due to causes as yet unknown along with a 70% reduction in bumblebee numbers over the past 30 years is giving cause for concern and could mean shortages of some foods later this year. Although probably not related directly to climate change, this example demonstrates how inextricably our survival may be linked to that of other species in ways as yet unknown.

The results of 'Big Garden Birdwatch 2007' were revealed at the end of March confirming what many of us had experienced in our own gardens. Blackbirds, song thrushes and robins, whose winter numbers are usually swelled by seasonal migrants from the continent, were at their lowest levels in gardens for five years. Warmer than average temperatures combined with an abundance of food meant that these birds did not need to migrate. The greenfinch fell from sixth to tenth place with their decline of more than 25% possibly caused by the *Trichomonas gallinae* outbreak last summer.

This past week has seen the arrival in our area of the first sand martins and swallows. The area had a fleeting visit from another returning migrant when an osprey dropped in at Pikelow Farm, Marton early last Tuesday morning but the bird departed after being mobbed by the local jackdaws and crows. Wouldn't it be nice to think that this bird was on its way back to the Lake District where ospreys have been breeding near Bassenthwaite Lake since 2001? David Ramshaw's recently published book 'The Lakeland Ospreys' tells the story of these particular birds and their ten offspring.

Equally unusual was the party of nineteen whooper swans that stopped off at Ridgeway Reservoir on the last day of March to spend the afternoon and evening there prior to continuing the journey to their breeding grounds in Iceland having possibly spent the winter around the Wash.

As you will be aware there is a policy, backed by the Government and the RSPB, to cull ruddy ducks in the U.K. because of their proclivity for mating with Spain's endangered white-headed duck. However, as a result of representations from Greater Manchester's Bird Recorder, Judith Smith and the eminent ornithologist Tom Gullick, who is based in Spain, the more than one hundred resident ruddy ducks on Wigan Flashes have had a temporary reprieve at least until the breeding season finishes in September.

We have a full programme of 'Showing Birds to People' Events for you over the next few months timed to coincide with peak bird activity. We hope you will join us at one or more of the venues. Equally, we look forward to seeing you at our Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, 8 May, which will be followed by Members' Slides where, if past experiences are anything to go by, we are in for some photographic treats.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group will take place on Tuesday, 8 May 2007 at 7.45 pm in the Senior Citizens' Hall, Duke Street Car Park, Macclesfield

YOUR COMMITTEE NEEDS YOU ! DO YOU HAVE THE TIME AND THE INCLINATION TO HELP?

Once again, because your Committee wholeheartedly endorses the view that a gradual turnover of its members and assimilation of 'new blood' is beneficial both to the stability and future progress of any organization, nominations are being invited for membership of the Committee. If you have a little spare time and you are willing to help in any way whatsoever your contribution will be welcome. Nominations should be submitted in writing to our Secretary, Margaret Ward along with signed letters from those proposing and seconding the nominee. The closing date for nominations for Committee is Tuesday, 1 May 2007. For details of submission rules and procedures please contact any member of the Committee.

Did You Know?

The name 'duncock' dates back to the 15th century and means 'brown bird'

The generic name Prunella means 'small and brown' and the specific name modularis means 'singer' or 'warbler'.

Dunlocks are often chosen as hosts by cuckoos and the 'parent' may even have to stand on the back of its 'offspring' to feed it.

NGS EVENTS AT PIKELOW FARM: REQUEST FOR PLANTS AND CAKES

If you are sowing seeds, taking cuttings or splitting plants that have become too big for their pots or plots, please consider whether you could cope with bringing on a few extra. We will be delighted to take any surplus plants off your hands in time for the two National Garden Scheme Events at Pikelow Farm where we will be selling plants in aid of Group funds.

We will also be selling refreshments, and would gratefully receive any cakes or biscuits that you can bake.

The first of these events 'Riot of Spring' takes place this month on Saturday, 28 April followed later in the summer by 'Big on Begonias' on Sunday, 15 July 2007.

MEMBERS' SLIDE SHOW

Do you have any interesting slides, digital images or short video sequences depicting wildlife at home and abroad that you think may be of interest to other Group members? If so, there is an opportunity for you to show them following our Annual General Meeting on Tuesday, 8 May 2007. Please limit presentations to 5 – 7 minutes to allow everyone the opportunity to take part if they wish. Inevitably, this may mean restricting your slides and digital images to no more than 15 and video sequences to no longer than 5 minutes.

If you intend to present in any of the above formats please make prior arrangements with David Tolliday (01625 432105). David would like to receive all digital images at least one week prior to the meeting. If possible, digital images should be 1024px X 768px at 72dpi saved in JPEG format at maximum resolution. If none of this makes sense, then simply let David have your digital images in their original format and he will configure them appropriately.

HOUSE MARTIN SURVEY

Once again, CAWOS is asking people to take part in this year's survey of breeding house martins in Cheshire and Wirral. If you have nesting house martins on your property or you know of sites where they are nesting please consider sending details to: Brian Martin, 45 Albert Road, Grappenhall, WARRINGTON, WA4 2PF
Tel: 01925 264251 E-mail: brianmartin1940@hotmail.com
All information welcome, e.g. numbers, recorded dates, breeding success (or not), anecdotes, etc. Please submit any information by end October 2007.

FURTHER GROUP DONATION TO THE RSPB

Your Committee has recently forwarded a further donation of £1,000 to The RSPB from the Macclesfield Local Group. We understand that these funds will be used for ongoing wetland improvement work such as rush cutting and provision of new fencing at the Dee Estuary Reserve where avocets bred for the first time last year. Let us hope that they return to breed there again in 2007.



THE APPLIANCE OF SCIENCE

During the last three weeks a number of articles have appeared in national publications concerning scientific testing and evaluation in the world of ornithology. Articles included – how pigeons find their way home, how the isotope signature of bird feathers indicates migratory routes and an account of the record-breaking flight of a godwit.

Migrating birds display a remarkable ability to fly thousands of miles to a specific garden or tree year after year. Speculation about how this is done has been debated for years. Most agree that a number of strategies are used including interpreting visual clues (geographical landmarks – similar to us reading and interpreting a map; using the position of the sun and stars), sensing wind direction and using the earth's magnetic field. Past tests have confirmed that birds can detect the global magnetic field but it was not known how it was done. Now a team from the University of Frankfurt have shown that it is iron bearing particles of maghemite and magnetite, present in cellular material - found in the skin lining the upper beak of homing pigeons, that are effectively acting like the needle of a compass, thus the pigeons can find their way home. Similar iron containing cells have been found in robins, warblers and chickens, so is presumably a universal feature of all birds. We follow our noses; birds follow their beaks!

Tracking migratory birds is done in a number of ways including trapping and ringing, using radio and satellite tags and observation and counting at known stopover points. A new approach, pioneered at the University of Durham, involves analysing the strontium isotope ratio in birds' feathers. Isotopes are variants of the same element. For example hydrogen has an atomic weight of one but deuterium, one of its isotopes, has an atomic weight of two. "Heavy water" used in the atomic energy or nuclear industry is made from deuterium. Isotopic ratios of many elements have been measured in a variety of substances at locations across the world – including soils and water, thus a particular ratio will pinpoint the place of origin. This technique has been used on human archaeological remains to find where the individual was born and raised. For example some UK excavated "Romans" were found to have come from countries or areas outside the Roman Empire. Work at Durham has so far concentrated on Sedge Warblers. Feathers found at nest sites have been analysed to find the original geological location of the adult birds. Migratory birds regularly renew their feathers, often prior to annual migration, and these feathers tend to reflect the isotope signature of the region in which they were grown. Strontium isotope ratios provide more precise location details than carbon, nitrogen, hydrogen or oxygen, frequently used in archaeological investigations.

Finally, we come to the record breaker! A tiny tracking device was implanted under the skin of a female Black-tailed Godwit, known as E7 (not a very romantic name is it?). E7 left New Zealand on March 17th 2007 and landed exhausted a week later on the mudflats of Yalu Jiang in North Korea. She travelled 6,341 miles (10,205 kilometres) NON STOP at an average speed of 35 mph (56 km/h) and at altitudes of up to 1¼ miles (2 kilometres). She burnt off half her body weight on the journey. This is not the end of the story. After feeding up and putting on sufficient body weight E7 and friends will fly onto Alaska where they will breed. Only birds older than four/ five years make this long and remarkable journey. In June Godwit chicks will be hatched in Alaska and the juveniles will set off for New Zealand when they are ten to twelve weeks old. They will arrive in New Zealand in September. This is the same species seen in the UK but our birds come from Scandinavia or Iceland. In July 2004 a Black-tailed Godwit arrived at Tittesworth Water and was identified by its rings. Subsequent investigation, via the University of East Anglia, found that this bird had been ringed in northern Iceland in June 2003 but before turning up in our area it had visited Clonakilty Bay, Ireland, in August 2003 and the Humber Estuary in January 2004. This bird was not a record breaker but certainly serves to further demonstrate how far this species is prepared to travel. There is a great charm about birds including that they are not limited by boundaries or country. They go where they please or as directed by their natural biological responses. This is a great freedom, which we do not have.

Ray Perry

EARLY BREEDING TAWNY OWL IN CHESHIRE - 2007

January 27th. A normal survey day on my tetrad for the CAWOS wintering and breeding bird atlas. Investigating a tree hole, I was surprised to see what looked like tawny owl feathers lying in the hole.

January 28th. A friend who is a BTO licensed ringer went with me to investigate. An adult tawny owl flew out of the hole; she was sitting on three eggs.

The following week the weather turned cold and snowy at times, I was worried about her, but she was sitting peacefully at each visit that I made. I did not disturb her but I was concerned about her and the eggs.

An unexpected visit to Canada meant that I could not visit again until the last day in February.

February 28th. The adult was still sitting, but a fluffy owlet was seen climbing over her back. I would think that the chick was only a few days old.

March 3rd. Adult was still sitting- no sign of young, but I could just make out white fluff under her belly.

March 10th. Took my ringer friend back to see progress. To our surprise, the adult was nowhere to be seen, but one owlet sat in the hole – quite large and obviously ready to be ringed. There was no sign of the other two eggs or any other young, but this youngster looked very well and healthy. We think that at this early date, food may have been difficult to find for three chicks and the eldest, strongest owlet had consumed its younger siblings.

March 17th. The owlet had grown considerably in a week and was beginning to get brown facial disc.

March 24th. It had fledged.

Is this the earliest breeding tawny owl in Cheshire, or do you know better?

Trisha Thompson



Photo by Trisha Thompson

Did You Know?

Dunnocks are normally unobtrusive, quiet birds but during the breeding season males establish territories by singing loudly from perches and, at close quarters, flicking their wings at each other.

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.)