



for birds  
for people  
for ever

# The Heron



## Newsletter - February 2007

For Your Diary	
February 2007	
Saturday, 17 February to Sunday, 18 February	<i>Short Weekend Away:</i> <b>TEESSIDE</b>
March 2007	
Friday, 2 March	<i>CAWOS:</i> <b>AGM</b> followed by <b>50,000 HOURS OF FIELDWORK – FOR WHAT?</b> by David Norman 7.45 pm at Cranford Suite, Civic Centre, Toft Road, Knutsford
Wednesday, 7 March	<i>CWT:</i> <b>AGM</b> followed by <b>CONSERVATION WORK AT LOCAL RESERVES</b> 7.30 pm at St John's Church Hall, Earlsway, Macclesfield
Sunday, 11 March	<i>WGBG Coach Trip:</i> <b>FAIRBURN INGS AND OLD MOOR RSPB RESERVES</b> Depart at 8.00 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow
Tuesday, 13 March	<i>Indoor Meeting:</i> <b>A LANE IN A POLISH MARSH</b> by Mike Lane
Saturday, 17 March	<i>Special Event:</i> <b>AN INTRODUCTION TO BIRDWATCHING</b> at Pikelow Farm, School Lane, Marton. 10.00 am – 4.00 pm This all day event is for anybody new to birdwatching. There will be talks and demonstrations on all aspects of birdwatching including optics and bird identification. After lunch you can take a guided walk around the farm and see birds close-up from hides sited at feeding stations. (Bring your camera). The event is FREE but advance booking is required, as numbers are limited. Please bring a packed lunch. Enquiries: Ray Evans 01625 432635
Sunday, 25 March	<i>Outdoor Meeting:</i> <b>WORLD'S END, Nr. LLANGOLLEN, NORTH WALES</b> A new upland venue for the Group with the possibility of black grouse. Depart at 8.00 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip. Leader: Ray Evans 01625 432635

### Tytherington Wood – Nature Conservation Strategy

There will be a Drop-in Session at Tytherington Family Worship Church, Sandwich Close, off Dorchester Way, Tytherington, Macclesfield, SK10 2UD on Wednesday, 28 February 2007 from 3.00 pm until 7.00 pm for local residents and other interested parties to learn about and comment on the proposed Nature Conservation Strategy for this ancient semi-natural sycamore, beech and oak woodland between Dorchester Way and the River Bollin. Macclesfield Borough Council Conservation Officer, James Baggaley, along with members of MBC and Bollin Valley Partnership Ranger Services will be on-hand to explain the strategy in detail.

#### Did You Know?

*The blackbird has the finest song of all British thrushes - a rich, clear, mellow flute. It is extremely varied and complex with almost no repetition. The bird adds to its repertoire throughout its life by inventiveness, learning and mimicry.*

*UK blackbirds are resident, and rarely move far from their home ranges. In winter, they are joined by Scandinavian birds that have migrated south.*

## CHAT FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends,

Over many centuries throughout Europe birds have been linked with St. Valentine's Day supposedly because they began to choose their mates around 14<sup>th</sup> February. Back in 1382, Geoffrey Chaucer in his "Parlement of Foules," wrote: "For this was Seynt Valentine's Day when every foul cometh ther to choose his mate. Chaucer's initiation of St. Valentine's Day as a celebration for love-birds of all species began a remarkable tradition of wide social and cultural impact still thriving today in florists and card shops. It is appropriate therefore that the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) should have chosen St. Valentine's Day as the start of their National Nest Box Week. This initiative, supported by the Wildlife Trusts, was launched in 1997 in an attempt to compensate in part for the loss of natural nest sites such as hollow trees and cavities in old buildings. This year the BTO are encouraging us to register our nest boxes on their website [www.bto.org](http://www.bto.org) and then let them know about what residents we have attracted, particularly to 'new' homes, and whether they go on to breed successfully.

I hope that you all enjoyed participating in The RSPB's 'Big Garden Birdwatch' (BGBW) during the last weekend in January. Although the official results will not be known until March, it is already clear that there are likely to be significant declines in some species and a marked difference between the north and south of the country. The RSPB were inundated with calls from people asking, "where all the birds had gone". Normally at this time of year birds would be foraging in our gardens for vital winter food but, because of the mild weather and plentiful supply of food still in the countryside, our native birds are staying put and many of the birds from Northern Europe have not migrated here in the usual numbers. Those birds that have migrated to Britain are not moving as far south for the same reasons. It is very likely that some exotic and unusual bird species will have been reported visiting gardens during BGBW this year as a result of the previous week's gales devastating some aviaries.

A recent paper entitled 'Farmland Biodiversity and the Footprint of Agriculture' which appeared in *Science* (Vol. 315, No. 5810, pp. 381 – 384) reports on a 'health check' system devised by UK scientists to help predict the future impact of farming on an area's biodiversity. Farmland birds were used because they are the focus of biodiversity conservation and an index of farmland birds is one of the fifteen headline indicators of sustainable development in the UK. The assessment of each species was based on the individual set of requirements it needs from the environment. In the case of birds, this came down to needing somewhere to nest, somewhere to feed, and food availability. For example, the yellowhammer nests in hedgerows and in field margins, feeds its chicks on items in the hedgerow and in the field and in the winter relies for its food on seed which was spilt in the field. Interestingly, the Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) scheme for farmers, designed to mitigate the detrimental effects of agriculture, tends to concentrate on field margin and hedgerow management whereas degradation within cropped habitat appears to be the key driver for population decline of this and other species. The assessments indicate that the switch from spring to autumn sowing of cereals may be a major reason for the decline in many farmland birds.

Ray Evans

### Mesh bags - a warning

The recent distressing experience of a local lady who found a blue tit entangled in the mesh of a fat ball that she had hung in her garden acts as a timely reminder about the dangers of nylon mesh bags. As she found these may trap birds leading to broken or torn off feet and legs or even death as they struggle to get free. Furthermore, woodpeckers and other birds with barbed tongues can become trapped by their beaks.

All nylon mesh packaging should be removed from fat balls (and peanuts) before transferring them to appropriate feeders. Various suitable fat ball feeders are available, the choice of which will depend upon whether you need to protect the fat balls from marauding starlings or corvids who will demolish them in a very short time.

### Did You Know?

*In the 1860s blackbirds were introduced to south-eastern Australia and to New Zealand, from where they have spread onto a number of Pacific islands*

*.When blackbirds moult during the late summer and early autumn, they become quieter and less conspicuous than at other times of the year. This makes many people think that the birds have disappeared.*



Blackbird by John Busby

## READ ALL ABOUT IT!

Those of us into birdwatching are likely to thoroughly read *Birds* the magazine of the RSPB and if we are into regular birding then the monthly *Birdwatching* magazine will feature in our reading list. If we are more deeply entrenched into birding, requiring much background information, then we probably read *British Birds* and *Ibis*. If we are keen on chasing up rarities then we will consult a pager and perhaps several Internet sites. At a local level we will read newsletters from our wildlife organisations and perhaps features in our local newspapers – a good example of the latter being David Taylor's wildlife articles in the Macclesfield Express – under the pen name of "Water Rail".

What about our national newspapers? How do they measure up? Taken overall – not very well. If the BTO or RSPB issue a press release then most dailies will take up the information, especially if doom and gloom is predicted. As far as I can tell the only newspapers to regularly address birding and other wildlife pursuits are the *Times* and *Sunday Times*. From Monday to Saturday Derwent May publishes a small article entitled Nature Notes. He frequently writes about birds but does not ignore non-avian fauna and plants. In the *Sunday Times* Derwent has an extensive article each weekend entitled *Feather Report*, inevitably talking about birds. He always includes a piece covering "what's about" for twitchers (for the real rarities) and for birders (the arriving and departing migrants).

Derwent May has written three books about birding, which are worth searching out. Robson Books Ltd published all three. The first, *The Times Nature Diary*, was published in 1983 (ISBN 0-86051-225-8), based on his Nature Notes articles. His second endeavour, *Feather Reports*, was first published in 1996 as a hardback and then in 1999 as a paperback (ISBN 1-86105-245-6). His most recent book, *How to Attract Birds to your Garden*, was published as a hardback in 2001 (ISBN 1-86105-439-4).

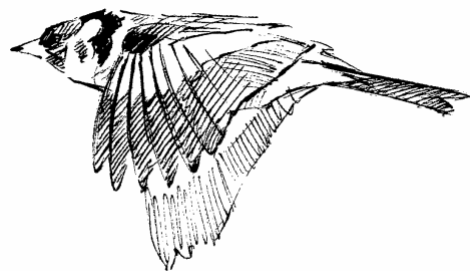
Simon Barnes is another writer associated with the Times newspapers. His main job is to write on sport and is an award-winning writer in this area but Simon writes passionately about birding on a fairly regular basis. Simon will be familiar to *Birds* readers because he is a regular contributor. Simon has published the following best selling books: *How to be a Bad Birdwatcher* and *A Bad Birdwatcher's Companion*. Short Books published both books. The book's reference numbers are as follows: "Bad Birdwatcher" ISBN 1-904095-95-X, published in 2004, and the "Companion" ISBN 1-904977-37-5, published in 2005.

Of course there is a mass of other printed information available from bookstores and online. We all have our favourite bird identification guides and there are books about individual species and groups of birds plus accounts of a lifetime of birding by experts such as Bill Oddie. The long running Poyser series is always worth investigating, some titles being valuable collectors items. Various atlases are worth a mention, such as *The Breeding Bird Atlas of Cheshire and the Wirral*, *The Migration Atlas* and *The Historical Atlas of Breeding Birds of Britain and Ireland: 1875-1900*. I'm particularly fond of books by wildlife artists, particularly bird artists. Some of my favourites include – *Bird Impressions* by Darren Rees, *Field Sketches* by Michael Warren, *Birds and Light* by Lars Jonsson, *An Autobiography in Painting* by Keith Shackleton and *Mereside Chronicle* by Charles Tunnicliffe.

It is worth mentioning that if you buy a bird book of any description from Picture Book at 6, Stanley St, Leek, then you will be offered a 10% discount if you are a member of the RSPB. This is an excellent bookshop stocking a very wide range of wildlife books covering all fauna and flora subjects. Books not in stock will be ordered. Another great source of wildlife books is Bookstore at Brierlow Bar, Ashbourne Rd (A515), just outside of Buxton where older and remaindered books are usually heavily discounted. Bookstore carries a good range of flora and fauna books, including bird field guides. Derwent May's book *How to Attract Birds to your Garden* is currently available at the silly price of just £2.99! The Bookstore people are very much into birding and encourage birds to their site by providing many bird feeders in the trees edging the car park. On our group website Lin Townsley recently reported a very large flock of goldfinches on the feeders during a recent visit to the shop.

I'm sure most of you are avidly reading up on birds when you get the chance but perhaps the above titles may encourage you into other directions.

Ray Perry



Goldfinch by John Busby

### Did You Know?

*Blackbirds are not expert snail-breakers, and so they listen to song thrushes breaking snails and try to rob the spoils.*

*Partial albino blackbirds, with some white feathers, are found more commonly than any other species, most often in urban areas.*

## **HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE KILLERS IN OUR MIDST - GROUND BREAKING MULTI-MEDIA PROJECT EXPLORES MAN'S FICKLE RELATIONSHIP WITH BRITAIN'S NATURAL PREDATORS**

Is it a good idea to bring back the lynx and the wolf to our forests? Can the shooting of hen harriers and peregrine falcons ever be justified? Are our 'domesticated' cats little more than calculating murderers? Questions like these are rousing passions in a thought-provoking discussion at [www.toothandclaw.org.uk](http://www.toothandclaw.org.uk)

Anyone with an interest in wildlife and the countryside is being urged to visit this new website to take part in the most far-reaching survey ever into attitudes towards Britain's predators. The site also provides non-biased factual information on many 'natural born killers' and a discussion forum where anyone can voice their opinion on a diverse range of predator-related topics.

The new site is a key part of the independently run Tooth & Claw project originated by top wildlife photographers Peter Cairns and Mark Hamblin along with eco-tourism expert Ian Rowlands. The ultimate aim of Tooth & Claw is to improve communication and awareness about predator issues and to develop a fresh consensus on the way humans and animal predators can share the same space. The authors hope to communicate the ideas and stories that emerge and encourage a better understanding of predator ecology through a wide range of multi-media resources for use by schools, countryside groups and tourism initiatives.

The authors are no strangers to the issues being debated. Rowlands is a lecturer and eco-tour leader with 20 years experience, whilst Cairns and Hamblin are photographers, writers, regular contributors to wildlife and country pursuit magazines, and authors of 'Wildland – Images of Nature from the Cairngorms'.

"Love them or loathe them, everyone has an opinion about predators," says Hamblin. "Despite our deep-rooted fascination with foxes, birds of prey and even wolves, their instinctive need to kill other animals to survive can trigger extreme reactions in us all. Already the website is attracting enormous interest, and our thought-provoking on-line questionnaire is revealing some strongly held views."

According to Cairns: "Through Tooth & Claw we're exploring the emotive issues that surround predators, and challenging entrenched thinking and ill-informed ideas. The time is right to build bridges between conflicting interest groups and we firmly believe this can only emerge through constructive dialogue, a better understanding of our wild predators and a stronger empathy with communities whose lives are affected by their presence."

"The Tooth & Claw project is special because it is non-judgemental and has no single-interest agenda," adds Rowlands. "All opinions are valid – from those who manage our countryside, those who live and work in it, and those who simply escape to it from the hurly-burly of urban life. Everyone is very welcome to visit our website to have their say, and maybe come away a little wiser, because Tooth & Claw reminds us of our place in nature.....as the most powerful predators of all."

To learn more about predators or take part in the survey or discussion forum please go to our website [www.toothandclaw.org.uk](http://www.toothandclaw.org.uk).

### **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**

**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. These 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.**

**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.)*