

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



for birds
for people
for ever

The Heron



Newsletter - March 2007

FOR YOUR DIARY

MARCH 2007

Sunday, 25 March

Outdoor Meeting: **WORLD'S END, Nr. LLANGOLLEN, NORTH WALES**
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

APRIL 2007

Tuesday, 10 April

Indoor Meeting: **THE GAMBIA** by Mike Wilkes

Sunday, 15 April

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.
Leader: Hugo Charlton-Jones 01204 415200 or 07949 022986

Thursday, 19 April

MCBOCG Special Meeting: **A POT POURRI OF WILDLIFE** by Andy Harmer
8.00 pm at The Floatel, London Road, Northwich
Contact: 01606 75937 for further details.

Sunday, 22 April

CWT Special Event: **TRENTABANK WILDLIFE DAY**
Watch the nesting herons from the dam or view live close-up pictures on the new monitor at the Visitor Centre. Under cover displays, live exhibits and activities. Wildlife gardening advice. Something for all the family. The RSPB, Macclesfield Local Group and Wildlife Explorers will be present at this event.
11.00 am – 3.00 pm Trentabank Reservoir Visitor Centre, Macclesfield Forest

Thursday, 26 April

Showing Birds to People: **RIVERSIDE PARK, MACCLESFIELD**
Meet in the Car Park off Manchester Road near Audi garage at 10.00 am for a leisurely stroll looking for summer visitors. Finish at 12.00 noon approx.
Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635

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).

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.

www.macclesfieldrspb.org.uk

Registered Charity Number 207076

CHAT FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends,

Although we are less than two weeks into March, spring is in full bloom over much of the country. At the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, where they have been monitoring around 100 plants for the past 50 years, data show that, for the majority, flowering and fruiting are both occurring earlier, in some cases by more than a month. Interestingly, the few exceptions are plants whose flowering is triggered by change in day length not temperature. The breeding and survival of animals has been affected similarly, particularly this year, where we have experienced the second mildest winter on record. Hedgehogs give birth in the autumn when there is a plentiful supply of food upon which they can feed and build-up their fat reserves ready for hibernation. Normally, the weakest animals would perish during cold spells but, because of the warmer climate, these animals are now managing to survive hibernation, but only just. Rescue centres, such as St. Tiggywinkles, have been inundated with sick and underweight hedgehogs plus the young of many other species including rabbits, grass snakes and ducklings – all because they were born at the wrong time.

Toads, newts and pipistrelle bats, which are normally still hibernating, have all been found out and about but, unfortunately, there may not be sufficient insects around for them to survive. Last week, while out and about, I heard a chiffchaff singing, probably one of the increasing numbers that now overwinter in the UK.

Research into the feeding habits of some of our best-known farmland birds has revealed that some are very restricted in the type of grain they can eat while others can cope with a varied diet. It appears that house and tree sparrows are able to crush grain in their bills rather than having to remove the husks first. Cereal grains such as wheat and oats are the preferred winter food for house sparrows, corn buntings and yellowhammers on farmland while tree sparrows will eat sunflower hearts and rape seeds also, and surprisingly, reed buntings will consume maize. The authors of the report stress the importance of providing a good varied mixture of seeds similar to those that would have been automatically available before farming became so efficient. In the past, weeds would have survived and plenty of grain would have been spilt during the autumn harvest adding to the variety of food available.

This past month has seen a number of reports concerning endangered species.

Satellite tagging has enabled scientists to follow the migration route taken by the rarest birds in the Middle East, bald ibises, from their wintering grounds in the Ethiopian highlands to Syria. Hopefully, this information will enable conservationists to safeguard this endangered species during migration as well as on its wintering grounds. One puzzle still remains – where do the younger birds spend the winter? Maybe further satellite tagging will provide the answer.

Five years of detective work by ornithologists has led to the pinpointing of the wintering grounds of the aquatic warbler, Europe's most threatened migratory songbird. The aquatic warbler breeds in the marshes of eastern central Europe (principally Poland, Belarus and the Ukraine) and some pass through southern England each year on migration. 5,000 – 10,000 of the birds were found in Djoudj National Park, in northwest Senegal. Isotope analysis of feathers grown while the birds were on their wintering grounds enabled the team, with the aid of isotope maps, to home in on an area just south of the Sahara. The birds were found while studying suitable wintering habitats in the delineated area.

A large wintering population of one of Eurasia's critically endangered birds, the sociable lapwing, has been discovered in Northern Syria. Population estimates for this bird range between 400 and 1,500 but this expedition found around 1,500 birds within a few grassland sites. Hopefully, this discovery will enable effective protection measures to be put in place to prevent illegal hunting and habitat degradation.

The next few months will see the departure of those of our winter visitors still remaining and the arrival of our spring migrants. I am currently looking forward to hearing my first willow warbler of the year and to seeing my first returning swallow – I hope that you are too!!!

Ray Evans

BRING & BUY SALE

Your Committee wish to express their thanks to all of you who 'brought and/or bought' at last month's 'Bring and Buy Sale'. You can be justifiably proud of the record £117 raised this year. Thanks are due also to Clare and John Mortin who ran the stall so efficiently for us.

PLANTS

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 on Saturday, 28 April and Sunday, 15 July 2007 where, as well as providing refreshments, we will be selling plants in aid of Group funds.

SHORT WEEKEND IN HARTLEPOOL – JEWEL OF THE NORTH EAST

Seventeen members set off early on Saturday morning 17th February for Lemming Services on the A1 near Northallerton. Following a cup of coffee or two we played follow the leader, as Tom Gibbons led the excited to the promised land – Cowpen car park at Greatham Creek where we met the advanced guard who decided to drive across on Friday to avoid getting up early.

As many of us searched the car boot for our binoculars the cry of short-eared owl meant two short sightings for the lucky few who were ready. The habitat was rough flooded pasture with a landfill site in the distance – welcome to the North East! The weather was bright and dry and our search for more birds tuned up a lonely fieldfare on a shrub and a merlin or was it a kestrel taking a rest on an old Second World War pillbox, a reminder of the past. A short drive down the road took us to a lay-by at Saltholme Pools Conservation & Wildlife Reserve. We bird watched from the road over flooded meadows and scrapes and almost immediately five common snipe flew up from the edge to take cover in longer grass. Wildfowl were abundant, wigeon, tufted duck, mallard, pochard and teal. Suddenly the lapwing and a large flock of golden plover, 350-500 strong took to the air and we all scanned for the bird of prey which turned out to be no less than five (yes five!), sparrowhawks chasing lunch and leaving still hungry. As we moved further down the road to check out the far end of the reserve we added redshank, ruddy duck and goldeneye to the trip list.

As it was midday we drove back down the road to Seaton Carew to eat our packed lunches sat on the sea wall. The telescopes were out and it wasn't long before we were treated to red throated divers, red breasted mergansers and great crested grebes amongst small rafts of common scoter and eider duck.

The afternoon saw us back parking in the Cowpen and a walk towards Greatham Creek to find the English Nature hides. En route we saw a little egret, now a common visitor with turnstone and oystercatcher checking out the rocks before the tide came in. At this point the group split into two so we could all sit comfortably in the hides. Tom's group were the most fortunate, watching another short eared owl hunting with a backdrop of the petrochemical works, then following the changeover a single long tailed duck was found – a target bird for many. We completed Saturday's activities at Seal Sands with the tide chasing waders (grey plover, ringed plover, redshank, dunlin & oystercatcher) common & black headed gulls onto the rocks as we watched from the top of the sand dunes.



At this point it was getting late, the light was deteriorating so we all set off for the Marine Hotel at Seaton Carew. The hotel was very comfortable and we all assembled for a pre-dinner drink in the bar. Dinner was carvery style for the majority with a few opting for the a la carte menu, we ate well before a brisk walk along the promenade and an early night.

Sunday morning started with a hearty breakfast and everybody packing up their cars. The weather was dry, bright and fresh – just what we needed as we all set off for Hartlepool headland. The target bird was the purple sandpiper and after some searching we found our quarry, hunting for morsels amongst the seaweed, together with oystercatchers, knot, redshank and curlew as the tide began to sweep in. As we set up our telescopes rafts of eider and common scoter were sighted together with a solitary guillemot and the now familiar red breasted mergansers and red throated divers.

Following a walk around the headland we set off to spend the rest of the morning back at Saltholme pools. Immediately we arrived the lapwing were up and some members of the group watched as a peregrine flew across the sky, again no lunch for his efforts. As we all settled down to check out the pools and surrounding long grass we found pink foot geese hiding amongst the greylags with the usual ducks and waders going about their daily business. As afternoon approached we all joined up to offer a vote of thanks to Tom Gibbons for organising an excellent short trip to the North East, a certain oasis for birds in an industrial landscape. During the course of the weekend the twenty members had opportunity to see around 72 species and enjoy some beautiful Hartlepool weather – who said it would be cold!

Ian Taylor

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. 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.

PAINTING WITH THE BROWNIES.

The Broken Cross Brownie group, based at the Broken Cross Methodist Church, have been involved with “birding” in the last month or so. They have taken part in the “Big Garden Birdwatch”, have made collage pictures of garden birds and have been addressed by Howard Rowley about the RSPB Wildlife Explorers Group. It was with some trepidation that I recently accepted an invitation by Susan Howell, the Brownie group’s leader, to give a presentation about drawing and painting birds. I need not have worried because the two -dozen or so Brownies were ebullient, charming and “up for it” – to use modern parlance.

I encouraged the girls to talk about ways of drawing and painting, which went very well, and then asked them to respond to my own pictures of a range of British birds. The most amusing encounter was when I showed them a picture of a very colourful British bird. The first response from a very young girl was that it must be a Kingfisher because of the bright colours. It was in fact a duck and having told them that the first letter of the name of the bird began with an “M” yielded a response of Margarine, which led to much merriment. When advised that the name of the species was associated with a fruit, we had the suggestion that it was a Melon! The truth is it was a picture of a male Mandarin Duck.

I showed them a simple approach to drawing a bird in pencil. The girls then had a go themselves and produced commendable pencil drawings of a Blackbird. I then showed them how to rough out a bird drawing in pencil followed by adding colour to complete a finished picture.

The girls then responded with enthusiasm and reproduced some remarkable pictures using only poster paint. They had a choice of using excellent photos from birding magazines or pictures that I had produced for this event. They were incredibly enthusiastic and inventive. I wandered around giving advice on mixing colour and on modifying their drawings and was impressed by their courteousness and genuine enthusiasm. At the end of the session most of the girls (average age 7/8 years) had produced two very acceptable paintings of British birds. The most popular were Kingfisher, Puffin, Barn Owl, Long-tailed Tit and Mute Swan. Most of the girls wanted to take their creations home to show their parents but all had agreed to bring them back for display in the church hall so that others could enjoy their efforts.

I was truly amazed at what had been achieved in this very short session, which lasted no more than an hour. The quality of some of the work was exceptional. Hopefully, at least some of these very young ladies will continue to draw and paint birds well into the future for their own pleasure and for others who view their work.

I am indebted to Susan for inviting me to introduce bird illustration to her Brownies. Although separated in age from the girls by at least two generations, I found the experience exceptionally rewarding. I hope all the girls will continue their enthusiasm for wildlife and birds in particular through the rest of their lives.

Ray Perry



I’ve always found it difficult to approach close to turnstones, but here are some trying to pinch chips!

If you have any photographs or stories that might amuse or be of interest to Group members, please contact Mike Thompson on 01625 536546

Many thanks to Duncan Hill for the use of the photo

NATIONAL GARDEN SCHEME EVENTS, PIKELOW FARM, SATURDAY 28TH APRIL

If you can make any cakes or biscuits for the Group’s refreshments stand, please contact Trisha Thompson on 01625 526546

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.)