



for birds
for people
for ever

The Heron



Newsletter - September 2007

FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday, 30 September	<i>Outdoor Meeting:</i> DERBYSHIRE RESERVOIRS AND GRAVEL PITS An area well worth visiting at any time of year but particularly during autumn migration. Depart at 8.00 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip. Leader: Ian Taylor 01260 275248
Wednesday, 3 October	<i>CWT Meeting:</i> RHODES ON FOOTPATHS; PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE by Peter Rhodes (Peak and Northern Footpath Society) 7.30 pm at St John's Church, Earlsway, Macclesfield
Friday, 5 October	<i>CAWOS Meeting:</i> BRITISH OWLS by Alan Gladwin 7.45 pm at Cranford Suite, Civic Centre, Toft Road, Knutsford.
Saturday, 6 October	Macclesfield and Congleton District Scout Fellowship Charities Fayre. 9.30 am – 1.00 pm at Town Hall, High Street, Congleton. Our Sales Team will be at this event with a selection of RSPB Christmas Cards, Calendars etc.
Tuesday, 9 October	<i>Indoor Meeting:</i> THE INTRODUCTION OF THE OSPREY TO RUTLAND WATER by Tim Appleton
Sunday, 21 October	<i>WGBG Coach Trip:</i> SPURN Depart at 7.30 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow.
Friday, 26 October	Special Event: 'FEED THE BIRDS DAY' FILM SHOW 7.30 pm at Bollington Arts Centre, 27 Wellington Road, Bollington, SK10 5JR An opportunity to see the latest wildlife films from The RSPB including ' Waterlands ', a visual celebration of our internationally important wetland habitats and their wildlife. Adults £3.50, Children £1.50. Tickets available at our Indoor Meetings or by post from Jean Evans, 112 Ullswater, Macclesfield, SK11 7YP. Cheques should be made payable to ' <i>The RSPB, Macclesfield Local Group</i> '. If applying by post, please send a stamped SAE or arrange to collect tickets on the door.
Saturday, 27 October	<i>National RSPB Event:</i> 'FEED THE BIRDS DAY' Join the RSPB Wildlife Explorers at Bollington Arts Centre anytime between 2.00pm and 4.00pm for a family event making interesting food and feeders for the birds. Contact: Tina Hanak 01625 503572
Sunday, 28 October	<i>Outdoor Meeting:</i> NORTH WALES COAST A popular venue for divers, sea ducks and waders. Depart at 8.00 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip. Leader: Ray Evans 01625 432635

Did You Know?

Mistle thrushes often commandeer a particular berry-bearing tree or shrub during winter and vigorously defend their 'larder' against all-comers. You may see them chasing off other birds, scolding them with their 'football rattle' alarm calls!

CHAT FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends,

I hope that you are fully refreshed after the summer break and looking forward to another full season of events and activities with The RSPB, Macclesfield Local Group. On a personal note, I wish to thank everyone who has helped at events during the summer and with the production and distribution of our annual magazine 'The Heron' along with the 2007-8 Programme and an accompanying package of information to every member.

We are witnessing the gradual departure of our summer visitors and it won't be long before we begin to see the arrival of birds that will spend the winter with us. Our resident birds will begin to return to our gardens in greater numbers as their food sources diminish in the fields and hedgerows. Now is the time to increase the amount and variety of food available at our birdtables and feeders.

Tricky situation?

Please keep a watchful eye on the condition of the birds, particularly greenfinches, visiting your gardens and feeders, as there are reports locally of a recurrence of the parasitic disease *Trichomonas gallinae*. Affected birds generally appear fluffed-up and lethargic. They may also drool saliva, regurgitate food, have difficulty in swallowing or show laboured breathing. Please report any instances of birds exhibiting these symptoms directly to The RSPB (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/helpingbirds/health/sickbirds/greenfinches.asp>) or, if you don't have access to the Internet, to me for onward communication.

If you have affected birds in your garden, it is recommended that you should remove and thoroughly clean and sterilise all feeders and then desist from putting out further food for at least three weeks to restrict transmission of the disease to other birds. Birdbaths should be cleaned and refreshed daily, if possible.

Bird conservation

Royal Mail has given their stamp of approval to The RSPB and other organisations by issuing a set of ten stamps, each celebrating a particular bird conservation success. Four birds that were at one time extinct in the UK, white-tailed eagle, avocet, marsh harrier and bittern are pictured along with Dartford warbler, peregrine, corncrake, curlew, bearded tit and red kite, all of which are doing well as a result of targeted conservation. Two of the photographs (avocet and curlew) featured on the stamps designed by Kate Stephens were by Mike Lane, whose excellent photography we experienced first-hand in March when he presented 'A Lane in a Polish Marsh'.

The publication of 'The State of the UK's Birds 2006' last month coincided with the release of an updated list of priority species and habitats that will guide future conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). This list, which comprises 1,149 plant and animal species and 65 habitats includes 59 bird species, more than double the 26 appearing in the first BAP list only twelve years ago. Avian additions to the list include house sparrow and starling, familiar garden birds whose populations have declined by more than 50% during the last 25 years. These are joined by rapidly declining woodland species such as willow tit and lesser spotted woodpecker as well as long distance migrants like cuckoo, yellow wagtail and wood warbler. Thirty-two of the 59 bird species qualified for inclusion because their UK populations have declined by more than a half over the last 25 years and, of these, 13 appeared in the original list. However, 11 of the original 26 no longer qualify because their populations have stabilised or improved through targeted conservation action but they remain on the list because they have yet to achieve safe, sustainable populations.

RSPB Coombes Valley

Those of you who have visited this reserve regularly will be aware that the hide overlooking the pool is deteriorating. Furthermore, it is considered to be too large and not in keeping with the rest of the reserve. It is proposed that the present structure is replaced with a more compacted seated viewing area providing a fresh outlook onto the pond and, more importantly, the brook, which is not visible presently. Work on the project is scheduled to take place during this coming autumn/winter. If you have any comments on the proposals please call Martin Randall, Site Manager on 01538 384017 (Office) or 07795 964028 (Mobile). Alternatively, you can write to him at the reserve or via E-mail to Martin.Randall@rspb.org.uk

Safeguard Our Sea Life

If you haven't done so already, can I encourage you to lend your support to the campaign to 'Safeguard Our Sea Life' by writing personally to Gordon Brown indicating that you would like to see a UK Marine Bill included in his Government's first legislative agenda. Such a bill is necessary if we are to fully protect our coastal offshore environment.

Loss of set-aside

There is real concern among conservationists that the benefits that set-aside has afforded to farmland and other bird populations could be negated when the scheme is scrapped next year. So far, the government has no plans for a replacement despite its proven benefits and their avowed target to reverse farmland bird declines by 2020. Species that have benefited most from set-aside are some of our most emblematic including skylark, yellowhammer, lapwing, corn bunting, barn owl, linnet and, of course, stone curlew.

Farmers are committed to helping reverse farmland bird declines but cannot do so without government help through subsidies to allow them to leave small areas of land fallow.

Doggone it!!!

Cats are usually the recipients of ‘bad press’ from bird lovers but recent research from Australia has shown that dogs may also adversely affect bird behaviour as evidenced by fewer birds in places frequented by dog-walkers. There was a 35% reduction in the range of bird species and 41% less individual birds even when dogs were walked on leads. Interestingly, the effect of humans walking alone was less than half that prompted by dogs on leads and, surprisingly, two humans were no more disturbing than one. This would suggest that birds inherently see dogs as a threat. Further investigations are now needed to quantify the duration of effect on bird numbers to see whether it is for just a few minutes or sustained for hours or even days.

Pinning our hopes for Sumatran rainforest

Since its inception, The RSPB’s ‘Pin Badge Scheme’ has raised £2.2 million for vital conservation work. The latest badges have been designed to highlight the plight of the birds and animals in the Sumatran rainforest and depict species such as Sumatran tiger, sun bear, rhinoceros hornbill and red-naped trogon. Hopefully, we will have some available at our next Indoor Meeting.

Ray Evans

WHEN THE CUCKOO PATROL MET THE BARN OWLS!

100 years ago in August 1907 the Boy Scout Movement began with a camp on Brownsea Island, Hants, lead by Robert Baden-Powell (BP), a veteran of the Boar War and the hero of the siege of Mafeking. This boy’s association blossomed and continued to develop right up until the 1960s. Today membership is a bit smaller but the movement still flourishes. I joined as an eleven year old and was assigned to the Cuckoo patrol. I was uneasy about this because a “cuckoo” is supposed to mean a mad or foolish person! Oh well, if the scout hat fits – wear it! There was also a Peewit patrol – a funny name I thought then, but better still there were the Owls and the Kingfishers. This for me was an early introduction to birds other than the House Sparrows found in my family’s urban garden.

Scouting was more than just woggles, dirty knees and bob-a-job. In the autumn and winter months we spent time indoors playing rough games, learning useful things like first aid and, more importantly, learning about the “great outdoors”. We also did the local gang shows and in my case participated in the Boy Scout Pageant at the Royal Albert Hall. In one scene I was a ghost of an American Indian along with a cast of thousands – well hundreds anyway, each playing a similar role. This came back to haunt me later in my time as a scout.

The “real deal” for us was to get out into the countryside. We had camps at Easter and Whitsuntide but best of all was the summer camp, two weeks – usually in Dorset but occasionally Cornwall. “Guv”, our Group Scoutmaster, a genuine philanthropist, sponsored this event for us relatively poor London kids. Guv once awarded me a prize of a large slice of “Guv’s Special” (fruit cake) for making the worst tasting tea in history at one of our indoor meetings. I loved Guv’s Special. A good result for me I think!

Summer camp meant filling long daylight hours with suitable activities. Various duties were inevitable – cooking, scavenging parties, fatigues (digging latrines, grease pits etc.) and the water party. In Eype, Dorset, the water party would take a new, clean, galvanised dustbin, mounted on a trek cart, to a barn on the far side of a local wood to collect water from the nearest water tap. This was done early in the morning just as the sun began to evaporate the dew into an eerie mist. On one holiday the Cuckoo patrol reached the barn only to find a “white face” sitting on a stone protrusion jutting out of the barn’s front wall. “It’s a spectre, a wraith, an err – err apparition!” I cried. I, of course, new about such things for I had been a ghost hadn’t I? The white being arose and lunged toward us. It appeared to be all head and wings. Our knees knocked but we stood our ground. The ghost, a Barn Owl, glided left and disappeared into the ethereal mist. We saw it and its companion most mornings and we always stood in awe of their brilliance. Later in the holiday the farmer cut the cereal crop in the next field to our campsite, using an old harvester seemingly covered in cutting blades and other moving parts, drawn by an old tractor and not, alas, by shire horses. We did the “stooking”, collecting the sheaves of corn and stacking them into rough cones. Each evening the Barn Owls would hunt over the cut field and were frequently successful in catching small prey.

The point of this story is that camping with the scouts lead me into another world. At home playing in the local parks enabled me to learn about conkers, acorns and climbing trees. At camp I learnt about leaves, the shape of trees, their barks and fruits. My knowledge of birds extended considerably and I even developed a rudimentary understanding of wild flowers. But I wanted to know more. My curiosity had been whetted. After I married I left London to live and work in Berkshire and assumed I would continue west into the heartland of my forefathers. My Dad came from Somerset and indeed; one side of my wife’s family came from Devon. It was not to be and we ended up in the northwest. I have absolutely no regrets. I’ve enjoyed the natural treasures of the northwest/midlands area for well over 30 years. Fortunately my ghostly friends, the Barn Owls, are still with us in this area. Occasionally I even encounter a Cuckoo! Three cheers for the Cuckoo patrol.

Ray Perry

Did You Know?

A hoverfly larva can eat up to 50 aphids in a day - over 1,000 in its lifetime

BRUSHES WITH WILDLIFE

Macclesfield RSPB Wildlife Explorers and Bollington Arts Centre will be celebrating the diversity of our wildlife by mounting their second Art Competition and Exhibition at the Centre.

Do you know any children who like to draw, paint or photograph our British wildlife? If so, why not encourage them to take part.

Entry forms and details are available at www.macclesfieldrspb.org.uk
or from Tina Hanak (01625 503572).

Closing date for entries: 30 September 2007.

Prizes in age categories: 8 and under, 9 - 12 and 13 - 19.

Prizes will be presented at the 'Feed the Birds Day' Event on Sat 27 Oct 2007.

Also on display will be an exhibition of pictures by local wildlife photographers.
Viewing on Sundays 14, 21, 28 October and 4 November, 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm.



Black-headed gull taken at Redesmere.

If you have any favourite bird or wildlife photographs or stories that you would like to share with others in our monthly newsletter, please contact

Mike Thompson
01625 526546
newsletter@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk

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 'Mini Weekend' to North Lincolnshire in February and to Dorset 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. If you are interested in either 'Weekend Away' and did not receive the insert, please request one.

Wanted

As ever, we want your old mobile phones, inkjet cartridges, stamps and binoculars.
Please bring to any indoor meeting and hand to a Committee member.

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.)