

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



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voices for
nature

The Heron



Newsletter - April 2008

FOR YOUR DIARY

APRIL 2008

Sunday, 20 April	<i>Outdoor Meeting:</i> ANGLESEY The place to see chough and black guillemot plus other auks and sea birds. Depart at 8.00 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip. Leader: Ian Taylor 01260 275248
Saturday, 26 April	<i>Special Event:</i> RIOT OF SPRING at Pikelow Farm, School Lane, Marton. 2.00 pm – 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. Contact: David Taylor 01260 224231
Sunday, 27 April	<i>WGBG Coach Trip:</i> BRANDON MARSH, Nr. COVENTRY Depart at 7.30 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow.
Tuesday, 29 April	<i>Showing Birds to People:</i> RIVERSIDE PARK, MACCLESFIELD Meet in the Car Park off Manchester Road (Grid Ref: SJ914745) for a leisurely stroll looking for summer visitors. 10.00 am – 12.30 pm. Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
Tuesday, 29 April	<i>MBCOCG Special Meeting:</i> A BARN OWL EXTRAVAGANZA Come along and find out all you ever wanted to know about barn owls. From 7.00 pm at The Memorial Hall, Northwich Contact: 07970 235473 for further details.

MAY 2008

Thursday, 1 May	<i>Showing Birds to People:</i> BOLLINGTON'S BIRDS A morning walk along the Middlewood Way and Macclesfield Canal looking for summer migrants with MBC Ranger, Paul Hughes. 8.00 am – 10.30 am. Meet at Adlington Road Car Park, Bollington (Grid Ref: SJ930781). Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
Friday, 2 May – Monday, 5 May	<i>Weekend Away:</i> WEYMOUTH, DORSET
Tuesday, 6 May	<i>Showing Birds to People:</i> DAWN CHORUS AT THE COPPICE A chance to brush up on your birdsong or simply enjoy it in the expert company of MBC Ranger, Pete Dowse. 6.00 am – 8.00 am. Meet at Poynton Coppice Car Park, Shrigley Road, Higher Poynton (Grid Ref: SJ942826). Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
Thursday, 8 May	<i>Showing Birds to People:</i> BIRDS OF THE GOYT VALLEY A walk in the upper Goyt Valley looking for ring ouzel, golden plover, curlew and whinchat with MBC Rangers, Paul Hughes and Pete Dowse. 10.00 am – 1.00 pm. Meet at Derbyshire Bridge Car Park, off the A537 (Macclesfield – Buxton) just past the 'Cat and Fiddle' (Grid Ref: SK019716). Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
Sunday, 11 May	<i>WGBG Coach Trip:</i> HODBARROW, CUMBRIA Depart at 7.30 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow
Tuesday, 13 May	<i>Indoor Meeting:</i> 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 20 of your own slides, digital images or a short video. (<i>See below for more details</i>).
Thursday, 15 May	<i>Showing Birds to People:</i> TEGG'S NOSE BIRDS An early morning walk in the woodland and scrub looking for pied flycatchers and redstarts with MBC Ranger, Paul Hughes. 7.00 am – 9.30 am. Meet at Tegg's Nose Reservoir Car Park, Langley (Grid Ref: SJ945718). Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
Thursday, 15 May	<i>Special Event:</i> THE HIDDEN SPLENDOURS OF RSPB COOMBES VALLEY A guided evening walk with the warden around parts of this reserve that are not open to the general public with the possibility seeing roding woodcock. 6.30 pm – 9.30 pm. Meet at Coombes Valley Visitor Centre, Nr. Leek (Grid Ref: SK009534). Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635
Saturday, 24 May	<i>Outdoor Meeting:</i> WOOLSTON EYES Another opportunity to visit this superb reserve and see black-necked grebes as well as warblers. Depart at 8.00 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip. Leader: Trisha Thompson 01625 526546 Please note that the above arrangements differ from those that appeared in the original version of our 2007 – 2008 Programme.

CHAT FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends,

Just when we thought that spring had arrived, colder weather has returned delaying the departure of many winter visitors and making early summer migrants wonder why they had left their warm wintering grounds. Of course, it is the imperative to breed where there is a plentiful supply of food for their young that drives them to make such long and arduous journeys. Furthermore, by arriving early the males have the choice of the best territories and can proclaim them to potential partners as they arrive. More and more chiffchaffs are choosing to remain in the UK rather than migrate thereby increasing their potential advantage. Even here in northern England, chiffchaff song has been reported earlier and earlier each year for the past five years.

The Osprey - The New Harbinger of Spring ?

Spring also sees ospreys returning from West Africa to their favoured breeding sites across the UK. By early April, BirdGuides had logged 56 separate reports of osprey sightings, the first of which was on 3 March. It is anticipated that this summer there will be around 200 pairs of ospreys nesting in the UK, mainly in Scotland. Many of the better-known characters are already back repairing and building-up their nests at popularly viewed sites such as Loch of Lowes (Nr. Dunkeld, Scotland), Loch Garten (Nr. Aviemore, Scotland) and Glaslyn (Nr. Porthmadog, Wales) as well as at Rutland Water. Who knows, the osprey seen circling Bottoms Reservoir, Langley while being mobbed by a crow on 31 March may have been one of those now on the nest in Scotland? A female bird named 'Logie' that usually nests near Forres (Moray, Scotland) was fitted with a GPS satellite transmitter last summer and her progress northwards has been monitored since she set off from Guinea Bissau on 12 March. She arrived on the Biscay coast near Bilbao on 26 March having travelled 2,224 miles over nine days. However, due to adverse weather conditions she has remained there. It is thought that the arrival of many other birds are being similarly affected including 'Henry' who, on his late arrival last year, did not take too kindly to his partner, EJ, being paired already with a rival male, VS. In the resulting drama, 'Henry' destroyed two clutches of eggs laid by EJ following her liaison with VS. Unfortunately, the chicks resulting from EJ's subsequent mating with 'Henry' did not survive.

Finches Are No 'April Fools'

On the BBC Radio 4 'Today' programme on 1 April there was an item highlighting the unusually large numbers of finches, especially siskins, remaining in the country and the RSPB's apparent concern that they are showing no signs of returning home. Therefore, a scheme to repatriate the birds has been announced by the RSPB involving using seed-baited traps to capture birds in gardens up and down the country and to forcibly repatriate them to Denmark. Participants in Big Garden Birdwatch were being asked to help. Mark Avery, RSPB Director of Conservation went on to explain that the birds are eating lots of food that UK birds need to survive on through the summer. Discussions are ongoing with British Airways about transporting them with the suggestion that, as they don't even have hand luggage they could easily use Heathrow, Terminal 5. Mark Avery assured listeners that no birds will be hurt and non-target species can be released.

Apparently, this 'spoof' caught out many listeners initially and it was only when they thought about the proposal that they realised it was an 'April Fool'.

The avian 'spoof' theme continued with viewers of 'Breakfast' on BBC1 being treated to some amazing footage showing a unique colony of penguins flying north to escape the Antarctic winter. According to the commentary, these particular birds flew thousands of miles to spend the winter in the rainforests of South America basking in the tropical sun.

Food for Thought !!!

Ornithologists are blaming the demand for out-of-season fruit and vegetables and other crops in North America and Europe for the destruction of tens of millions of passerine birds. The number of migratory songbirds returning to North America has gone into sharp decline due to the unregulated use of highly toxic pesticides and other chemicals across Latin America. The problem is so great that, by some counts, half of the songbirds that graced America's skies only 40 years ago have gone, wiped out by pesticides or loss of habitat.

A Marine Bill At Last

After years of campaigning by the RSPB and others, the government is promising pioneering legislation, including a new way to identify and protect important areas for marine wildlife. The bill also pledges better management of inshore fisheries and measures to speed up the approvals process for offshore windfarms by about a year. Crucially, although breeding seabirds are protected on land, there is currently no protection for the areas of sea next to their breeding colonies where they feed and rest. As envisaged, an effective network of Marine Conservation Zones should provide that protection. However, it remains to be seen whether the Bill is tough enough and whether the various agencies and governments can work together effectively. *Ray Evans*

*The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment.
Nature is amazing - help us keep it that way*

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654

www.macclesfieldrspb.org.uk

SUMMER MIGRANTS ARRIVE EARLY

Reports of summer migrants to the www.macclesfieldrspb.org.uk bird sightings records website suggest that a number of species have arrived earlier this year than reported on our website and annual garden bird survey in 2007. Given the weather I bet they wish they had waited a while!

The first sand martins this year were reported on 17 March compared with 31 March last year and the first house martin report was on 19 March with the earliest being reported in our garden bird survey in 2007 on 1 April.

The first swallow was reported slightly later this year on 21 March compared with 18 March in 2007 whilst willow warblers were first reported on 2 April in both years.

Of species that are only reported on our website osprey, wheatear and ring ouzel were all earlier arrivals in 2008 by three, 13 and four days respectively.

Please report any bird sightings, especially early arrivals of summer/winter migrants and uncommon birds, to

bird.records@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk

GREAT CRESTED GREBES AT LINDOW COMMON

The great crested grebe pair on Black Lake at Lindow Common had already hatched one of their eggs by the Easter Weekend and she was sitting tight in the snow on the other two.

Sunday 6th April also saw a layer of snow all over the common, but the female now had three young on her back, which she shook off into the icy water. No wonder they quickly scabbled back into her feathers - let us hope that they survive this unseasonal weather.

JULIA BOWS OUT AFTER 25 YEARS

After a record 25 years service, Julia Thornburn, our current Raffles Organiser, will be retiring from the Committee following this year's AGM in May. Julia became a member the Group in 1979 during its first season and, in 1983, joined the Committee as Outings Organiser, a role that she occupied for 10 years. Many of you will have fond memories of the trips that Julia organised, particularly the Weekends Away to venues further afield. For the past 15 years Julia has been organising the raffles at our Indoor Meetings, encouraging you not only to buy tickets but also to donate your unwanted gifts as prizes. Julia has contributed in so many ways to the Group's success over the years and her Committee colleagues will undoubtedly miss the wealth of knowledge and experience she has been able to contribute. I'm sure that you will join me in thanking Julia for her outstanding service to the Group and wishing her well in her deserved 'retirement'.

Julia's departure means that, unless a willing volunteer comes forward, we will be without a Raffles Organiser next season. If you feel that you may be able to take on this role or require more details before deciding, please contact Ray Evans (01625 432635) or Julia Thornburn (01625 582433) in confidence.

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, 26 April and Sunday, 20 July 2008 where, as well as providing refreshments, we will be selling plants in aid of Group funds. Additionally, we hope to have a 'Plant Stall' at our 'Wildlife and Outdoor World Extravaganza' (WOW 2008) on Sunday, 14 September 2008.

‘DRAGONFLIES AT THE EYES’ on Sunday, 10 August 2008

We hope you will join us for this, our last Outdoor Meeting of the season, when we expect to see banded demoiselle, migrant hawkler and red-eyed damselfly as well as other more common species. 9.30 am - 3.00 pm. You will need to bring a packed lunch. Meet at Woolston Weir, Weir Lane, Woolston, Warrington (Grid Ref: SJ654888).

Leader: Trisha Thompson 01625 526546

Please note that the above arrangements differ from those that appeared in the original version of our 2007 – 2008 Programme.

‘RIOT OF SPRING’ NATIONAL GARDEN SCHEME EVENT at PIKELOW FARM, MARTON on Saturday, 26th April 2008

If you are willing to make cakes, scones or biscuits for the Group's 'Refreshments Stall' or help in any other way at this event and/or at 'Big on Begonias' on Sunday, 20th July, please contact Trisha Thompson on 01625 526546



Fooled You?

A friend snapped these broken nuts doing a good impersonation of chicks begging for food. I wonder if any birds were fooled and tried feeding the hungry nuts!!!!

Many thanks to Chris Morton for allowing publication of his photo. More of Chris's work can be found at

www.pbase.com/crisscross

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group will take place on Tuesday, 13 May 2008 at 7.45 pm in the Senior Citizens' Hall, Duke Street Car Park, Macclesfield

Are you passionate about protecting wildlife and the countryside? Do you have a little spare time? If so, why not join your Local Committee and assist us in running the Group? Here is your opportunity to influence its future direction and progress. Nominations are invited for membership of the Committee. If you do have a little spare time and you are willing to help in any way whatsoever your contribution will be most welcome. Nominations should be submitted in writing to Ray Evans along with signed letters from those proposing and seconding the nominee. The closing date for nominations for Committee is Tuesday, 29 April 2008. For details of submission rules and procedures please contact any member of the Committee.

BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH 2008 – RESULTS

The average number of birds seen in each garden has declined by a fifth since 2004. Nevertheless, the house sparrow retained its top spot closely followed by starling with blackbird completing the top three and the numbers of finches visiting our gardens this winter are at their highest levels for five years. In fact, the goldfinch, as predicted, made it into the top 10 and the siskin made it into the top 20 for the first time in the survey's 29-year history. There were increased numbers of the scarcer finches also with brambling moving from 57 to 36 in the rankings and redpolls being seen in twice as many gardens as last year. It was good to see a significant increase (80%) in song thrush numbers as a result of last year's warm wet summer making food on which to feed their young easier to find. Cheshire's results were broadly similar to those from the UK as a whole except that long-tailed tit appeared in the top 10 while robin was absent. Interestingly, the numbers of each species seen in Cheshire gardens were on average 25% less than in UK gardens as a whole excepting goldfinch.

The increased number of finches in our gardens is thought to be due to a scarcity of food in their normal wintering grounds. Bramblings normally rely on beech seed or 'mast', which has been scarce this winter in northern Europe and Scandinavia while siskins and redpolls feed on conifers and deciduous seeds. When these normal sources are unavailable the birds look to our gardens and the varied food that we provide. In the case of goldfinches, their numbers are increasing because our milder winters are encouraging them to stay here rather than migrate to southern Europe.

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, 13 May 2008. 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).

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.)