



a million
voices for
nature

The Heron



Newsletter - April 2009

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group will take place on Tuesday, 12th May 2009 at 7.45 pm in the Senior Citizens' Hall, Duke Street Car Park, Macclesfield

Nominations Invited for Officers and Committee

At the Group's Annual General Meeting (AGM) last year, the Group Leader expressed his intention to retire from office at the AGM in May 2009. In accordance with the Group Constitution and Local Groups Manual, nominations were invited for this position. Disappointingly, at the closing date, Monday, 13th April 2009, no nominations had been received.

Lydia Taylor, our Membership Secretary, is seeking re-election to the Committee as her current 5-year term ends in May. We are pleased to report that, to date, we have received a further two nominations to fill vacancies on the Committee but additional new blood will be welcome also. Please consider doing your bit to help the Group in its aims of supporting the RSPB and helping to protect wildlife and the countryside. If you are willing to help in any way whatsoever your contribution will be most welcome. The closing date for nominations for Committee is Monday, 4th May 2009.

For details of submission rules and procedures please contact any member of the Committee. In all cases, nominations should be submitted in writing to our Secretary, Anne Bennett along with signed letters or E-mails from those proposing and seconding the nominee.

CHAT FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Friends,

Every year, I look forward, like many of you, to hearing the unmistakable descending trill of the willow warbler that, for me, says that spring has finally arrived. Although the vanguard of migrant species arrived some weeks ago, it is only this week that willow warblers, reed warblers and whitethroats have joined them. However, the simple two-note call of the cuckoo that used to be another sign that spring had arrived is heard no longer in many parts of Britain. Sadly, the species is rapidly disappearing from Britain along with many other bird species that, each year, migrate to us from sub-Saharan Africa to breed and spend the summer here. The reasons are not fully understood although massive declines in insect populations combined with climate change leading to a timing mismatch are favoured theories.

The RSPB's 30th Big Garden Birdwatch, in which more than half-a-million people participated, confirmed some of the changed behaviours that we have seen locally in our own gardens with, most notably, long-tailed tits entering the top-ten for the first time. This very adaptable species has been able to exploit the wider range of food that we are now offering in our feeders and on our bird tables.

The declining fortunes of farmland birds were in the spotlight once again at the recent BOU Conference in Leicester. It appears that, although effective measures can be taken to halt the decline in species such as corn bunting, yellowhammer, skylark and grey partridge, these are not always compatible with modern farming operations. In-field skylark plots are an example. Unfortunately, loss of set-aside has only served to exacerbate the already dire situation where nine out of nineteen bird species that rely on farmland for their survival are on the Birds of Conservation Concern Red List. It is therefore gratifying to see that a scheme similar to set-aside is once again under active discussion.

As this is my final 'Chat from the Chair' as Leader of The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group, I wish to take this opportunity to thank you all for the support and encouragement that you have given me and my Committee colleagues during my 5½ years in the role.

Ray Evans

‘HARE RAISING?’

We are fortunate to be overlooking farmland near the Macclesfield / Gawsorth border, so I have a great view from the back bedroom ‘office’ window.

The other day, whilst working late afternoon, (cooking our Group books??), I happened to glance up and saw what I thought at first glance was a silly dog dashing round on the field edge. A closer look revealed that this ‘dog’ was in fact a large hare, not in itself uncommon, but what was this strange behaviour?

Grabbing my ever present bin, I watched and realised with fascination, that the hare was in fact putting up two crows, each of which persisted in returning to a particular spot just over a ridge in the field. Not only the crows, but a passing, and seemingly quite innocent, pheasant was also put to flight.

Wondering what on earth was going on, my curiosity was relieved when I suddenly spotted a small brown shape jump up and drop back in the precise spot being given so much attention by the crows.

Clearly what I had been watching for the last ten minutes or so was an adult hare defending her leveret, which I can only assume she was moving on to a new scrape.

The ‘show’ went on for some twenty minutes in total, the crows persisting with the attack, but the hare’s bounding energy and determination seemed to win the day. In the end, the crows returning to their oak, and the hare, hopefully with her leveret, disappeared from view.

Gordon Howard

PROTECTING SWIFT NEST SITES IN MACCLESFIELD

Some of you will have read an article in 18th March edition of the Macclesfield Express about swift nest sites in Brookfield Lane. I became involved as the Northwest of England representative of a group called Swift Conservation when I received a telephone call from a resident in Brookfield Lane concerned that her landlords, Cheshire Peaks and Plains Housing Trust (CPPHT) had started re-roofing a number of properties on which swifts were breeding. Scaffolding had been erected denying the swifts access to their young behind the eaves. Clearly, this work should not have been carried out at that time of year and this was pointed out to the Housing Trust. To their credit they immediately stopped the work until young had fledged from other properties waiting to be re-roofed. Subsequently, the work was completed and the Trust agreed to slits being cut in the new uPVC soffits to allow swifts access to their nest sites in future years. In all over twenty slits were made, (of a size to allow swift access but not starling), and it is now a question of waiting to see if the swifts find these new entrance holes to their liking when they return in early May. The Cheshire Peaks and Plains Housing Trust should be congratulated for their co-operation with this project, but hopefully RSPB Macclesfield Local Group members will keep their eyes open as future roofing work is planned on CPPHT properties in other parts of the town. Let me know if you have any concerns.

Swift by Dan Powell



An interesting spin-off from the article is that other residents in Brookfield Lane have asked for swift access holes to be made in their properties and CPPHT have agreed to do this.

Fieldwork for the BTO’s Breeding Bird survey has revealed a massive drop of 40% in swift numbers in the UK since 1994 and it is believed that unsympathetic roofing work is largely responsible for this decline. Macclesfield still has a relatively high swift population, but we cannot afford to be complacent and if it had not been for the vigilance and concern of one resident in Brookfield Lane one of the biggest individual swift populations in Cheshire could easily have been lost.

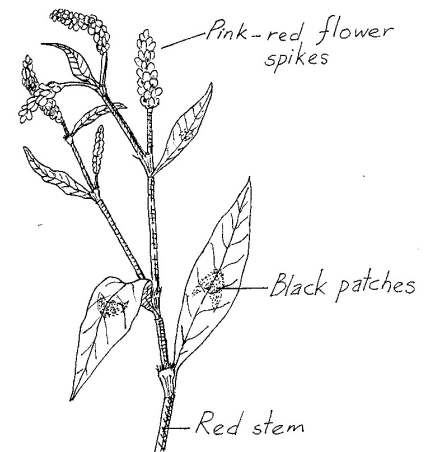
Brian Martin

SURPRISE, SURPRISE!!

Most of the time when we go birdwatching or nature watching we see what we expect to see. In the case of birding this means the residents plus the migrants – depending on season. I think what keeps us going is the chance that we will find something unusual from time to time. We are happy to see the familiar but finding rarities is a bonus. Often, however, other observations are made which are unusual.

In N Wales on the Great Orme there is a herd of Kashmir goats, not native to the UK but they have been present for 150 years. They are left to graze and breed, and most of the time they inhabit the steep escarpments of the Orme BUT in the winter and early spring they break out and invade the West Shore in Llandudno, feeding on the scrubby shrubs and tasty plants in resident's front gardens! On some occasions when I have stayed nearby and set out running quite early in the morning, I have encountered these browsing animals, which seemed unafraid of humans and the dogs being walked. Quite exciting really! On one early morning run I saw a raven perched on the back of a bench "shouting" at all the wildlife that came into view. This species breeds on the steep cliff-like areas of the Orme. Margaret and I once walked along the West Shore prom and noticed a flock of about 30 ringed plovers sitting quietly in the rocks/stones of the West Shore beach, facing the promenade and apparently observing the passing human crowd. We stopped and viewed them watching us and then passed on. No other promenaders noticed their presence. When we returned they had gone. On a recent trip to North Wales we had the pleasure of a red kite gliding over our car near RSPB Conwy.

At Tittesworth the path through Foster's Wood was widened a few years ago. As a result both sides of the path were edged with the plant redshank. Val Riley, a local botanist, told me that redshank was a plant of disturbed earth. The seeds lie dormant and only develop into flowering plants when earth is moved or turned over. In 1996 Margaret and I were finishing a walk around the reservoir when Margaret saw a duck she did not recognise. On checking in our field guide we found it was a garganey. We reported the sighting to the Head Ranger who told us it was only the third ever sighting of this species at Tittesworth. It was, of course, the first sighting for us. We once visited the site when the Conservation Pool and most of the creeks were covered in ice. The wind was blowing from the east and slightly lifting the sheets of ice causing some very strange and eerie sounds.



Redshank by Ray Perry

Kashmir Goat by Ray Perry



At Redesmere we saw a man walking by the mere edge with a barn owl on his hand. It was obviously not a wild bird but one that had been rescued. Great to see none-the-less! At Carsington Water we once observed a juvenile marsh harrier from one of the hides. It was present for about two minutes. No one else recorded seeing it. At Carsington, in the mating season, we have seen lengthy battles between male coots and also between male mute swans. On the Tees in County Durham we have seen a pair of goosanders with an enormous brood of 15 youngsters. In Cumbria we observed a peregrine swoop at a song thrush and miss! In Northumberland from our car we have seen short-eared owls quartering fields.

Back home in our garden we have observed great spotted woodpeckers and reed buntings attempting to eat bread! We have seen buzzards, greylag geese and mute swans pass by. We have seen, regrettably, sparrowhawks make spectacular but ultimately gory kills. Once the tables were turned when a juvenile female sparrowhawk swooped at prey and broke its neck on our front window. Such a shame. It was a beautiful bird. However, I'm sure the surviving prey was relieved!

The point about this small sample of hundreds of unusual observations is that, by looking and listening - when out and about, many interesting nature events will be encountered. The watchword must be – EXPECT the UNEXPECTED!

Ray Perry

PLANTS

If, as is often the case at this time of year, you have an excess of plants or cuttings, we will be delighted to take them off your hands in time for the two National Garden Scheme Events at Pikelow Farm on Saturday, 25th April and Sunday, 19th July 2009 where, as well as providing refreshments, we will be selling plants in aid of Group funds.

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, 12th May 2009. 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).

'RIOT OF SPRING' NATIONAL GARDEN SCHEME EVENT at PIKELOW FARM, MARTON on SATURDAY 25th APRIL 2009

Thanks to those of you who have already offered to make cakes and/or biscuits for the Group's 'Refreshments Stall' at the above event. Further donations of homemade cakes and/or biscuits will be most welcome as will offers to assist on the day. If you can help in any way, please contact Tricia Thompson on 01625 526546.



WILDLIFE EXPLORERS HELP SAVE THE HARAPAN RAINFOREST IN SUMATRA SPECIAL EVENT Bollington Festival Carnival Parade on Saturday 9th May 2009 - 10.45 am to 2.00 pm

Our Wildlife Explorers and their families will be walking in the Carnival Procession (1 mile) as part of a moving Sumatran Rainforest Ecosystem in support of The RSPB's ambitious project to restore the incredible habitat in the Harapan Rainforest. The Group will be walking as a moving rainforest ecosystem with Wildlife Explorers wearing wildlife masks and carrying fluffy toys to represent the huge variety of rainforest wildlife - all kinds of creatures from tigers to insects. We will need lots of green creepers, leaves and flowers to make the rainforest look lush.

Are you able to help make props and costumes? We would love to hear from anyone able to help Wildlife Explorers with our preparations making props and costumes for the Carnival Parade.

Can you supply any of the following items? The Carnival's theme is 'Going Green' and we want to recycle the following items as part of our parade: clean green carrier bags (all shades), clean green refuse sacks, green material, unwanted artificial foliage and flowers, coloured pipecleaners. No green paper please as the costumes need to be shower-proof.

Could you please spare half an hour to help with the Wildlife Explorers Stand? We will be selling Save the Sumatran Rainforest pin badges and running other fund-raising activities from a stand at the end of the parade. We would particularly appreciate your help setting up the stand whilst most of the Leaders, parents and children are walking in the parade.

Wildlife Explorers would be grateful for your support in any form - simply come along to cheer the children along in the procession and look around the carnival stands.

Please contact Tina Hanak, Group Leader, Macclesfield RSPB Wildlife Explorers on 07870 804413 or by E-mail on wex@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk. Thank you.

FOR YOUR DIARY

Sunday, 19 April	<p><i>Outdoor Meeting:</i> NORTHWICH WOODLANDS A chance to explore the birdlife and natural history of Marbury Country Park and the Northwich Flashes with the expert help of CCC Ranger, David James. Depart at 8.30 am from Duke Street Car Park for an all day trip. Leader: Gordon Howard 01625 420055</p>
Saturday, 25 April	<p><i>Special Event:</i> '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. Contact: David Taylor 01260 224231</p>
Sunday, 26 April	<p><i>WGBG Coach Trip:</i> POTTERIC CARR AND BLACKTOFT SANDS Depart at 7.30 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow</p>
Tuesday, 28 April	<p><i>Showing Birds to People:</i> RIVERSIDE PARK, MACCLESFIELD Meet in the Car Park off Manchester Road (Grid Ref: SJ914715) for a leisurely stroll looking for summer visitors. 10.00 am to 12.30 pm. Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635</p>
Tuesday, 5 May	<p><i>Showing Birds to People:</i> BIRDS OF WILDBOARCLOUGH Discover the varied bird life of the area on this moderate/strenuous 7km walk in the company of CEC Rangers, Paul Hughes and Peter Dowse. 9.30 am to 1.00 pm. Meet at Clough House Car Park, Wildboarclough (LR Grid Ref: SJ988699). Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635</p>
Thursday, 7 May	<p><i>Showing Birds to People:</i> BOLLINGTON'S BIRDS Find out which summer visitors have joined the resident bird life along the Middlewood Way and Macclesfield Canal on this leisurely 6km walk in the company of CEC Ranger, Paul Hughes. 8.00 am to 10.30 am. Meet at Adlington Road Car Park, Bollington (LR Grid Ref: SJ930781). Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635</p>
Sunday, 10 May	<p><i>WGBG Coach Trip:</i> YNIS HIR Depart at 7.30 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow</p>
Monday, 11 May	<p><i>Showing Birds to People:</i> DAWN CHORUS AT THE BRICKWORKS A chance to listen and learn about birdsong or just simply to enjoy it during a short walk in the company of CEC Ranger, Peter Dowse. 6.00 am to 8.00 am. Meet at Jacksons' Brickworks Car Park, Pool House Road, Higher Poynton (LR Grid Ref: SJ945844). Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635</p>
Tuesday, 12 May	<p><i>Indoor Meeting:</i> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by MEMBERS' SLIDES</p>
Thursday, 14 May	<p><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 in the company of CEC Rangers Paul Hughes and Jim Middlemass. 7.00 am to 9.30 am. Meet at Tegg's Nose Reservoir Car Park, Langley (LR Grid Ref: SJ945718). Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635</p>
Friday, 15 May to Sunday 17 May	<p><i>Group Weekend Away:</i> ANGLESEY Contact: Graham Palmer 01625 420179</p>
Thursday, 28 May	<p><i>Evening Walk:</i> THREE SHIRES HEAD This is one of the best local sites to see ring ouzel, wheatear and red grouse. Meet at 6.30 pm in the lay-by on the A54 near Danebower Chimney (LR Grid Ref: SK007698). Contact: Gordon Howard 01625 420055</p>
Wednesday, 3 June	<p><i>Evening Walk:</i> GRADBACH Redstarts, pied flycatchers and woodwarblers can be found in this area. Meet at 6.30 pm at Gradbach Car Park (LR Grid Ref: SJ998662). Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635</p>
Sunday, 5 July	<p><i>Outdoor Meeting:</i> THE DRAGONFLIES OF ANDERTON AND MARBURY Under the guidance of a local expert, we hope to see many of the nineteen recorded species of dragonfly and damselfly that inhabit the ponds in this area. 10.00 am to 3.00 pm. Meet at Anderton Boat Lift Car Park (LR Grid Ref: SJ649754). Leader: Tricia Thompson 01625 526546</p>
Sunday, 19 July	<p><i>Special Event:</i> 'BIG ON BEGONIAS' 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 see breathtaking cascades of flowers in a myriad of colours. Contact: David Taylor 01260 224231</p>

MACCLESFIELD WILDLIFE EXPLORERS HELP CLEAN UP!

A group of volunteers from Macclesfield RSPB Wildlife Explorers joined Friends of the Carrs at the start of March in a concerted effort to clear litter and improve the condition of the banks of the River Bollin at Carrs Park in Wilmslow.

Wildlife Explorers had a fantastic morning. Practical conservation tasks are a wonderful opportunity for the children to see what a difference their hard work can make. An enthusiastic litter pick across the park cleared a wide array of abandoned rubbish. Litter of all kinds was safely disposed of and the intrepid collectors removed items including a traffic cone, pieces of drainpipe and a pink inflatable bed!

Wildlife Explorers then helped Rangers from Macclesfield Borough Council to plant young Willow trees where the banks of the Bollin within Carrs Park have become badly eroded. The roots of the saplings will help stabilise the bank and reduce erosion caused by the river and the heavy amount of dog traffic up and down the banks. A fence was then erected to protect the saplings whilst they become established.

The activity is part of a five-month campaign called CSV Action Earth supported by Morrisons supermarkets. The campaign is organised by the national charity Community Service Volunteers (CSV) and involves over 900 voluntary organisations, businesses and community groups that will be undertaking projects that are of immediate and lasting benefit to the environment.

Caroline Faulkner, CSR Manager, Morrisons said, "Morrisons is delighted to support this event. We are thrilled that our sponsorship of Action Earth has helped Macclesfield RSPB Wildlife Explorers with their project and we are sure it will make a real impact in helping to improve their local environment."

Tina Hanak



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

www.macclesfieldrspb.org.uk

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.)

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