



for birds
for people
for ever

The Heron



Newsletter - April 2005

NOTICES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PINS AND THINGS!

In October last year The RSPB decided to drop the old designation NSIP (National Sustainable Income Programme) for the more readily understandable label 'Community Fundraising'. The scheme is due to receive a boost this month as the Society issues 27 new pin badges that will include other wildlife including mammals and butterflies as well as additional birds. We hope that you will have first-time access to some of these new pin badges at our Garden Party and Plant Sale at Bonis Hall on Sunday, 8th May 2005.

GROUP DONATIONS TO THE RSPB

You will be proud and delighted to know that, on your behalf, your Committee has recently approved a further donation to The RSPB of £4,250 bringing to a staggering £9,000 the total donated directly by the Group during this financial year. The RSPB wish to use these funds to support Regional Conservation Projects, an example of which is the 'South Pennines Bird Project' concentrated on farmland immediately adjacent to the moorland fringe ('in-bye' land) where, by working with the farming community, The RSPB aims to restore and protect examples of hay meadow and rush pasture, habitats that are vital to upland breeding birds. Further details can be found in a new booklet for 2005 'Fundraising for Wildlife – Reserves and Projects in North West England'.

Sales of RSPB Goods this year have once again exceeded £7,000 thanks to the sterling efforts of Margaret and Tony Hayter and their willing assistants who have serviced and manned the Charity Christmas Card Shops and other outlets. The Group is permitted to allocate the resulting sales commission, which will amount to about £2,460, to one or more of the projects described in the above booklet. We would like to hear from you, the members, what type of project you believe the Group should be supporting on this occasion.

WEBSITE

Our Group website www.macclesfieldrspb.org.uk is proving to be a valuable source of information for our members and those who wish to find out more about The RSPB and birdwatching in our local area. Since December 2004 the number of 'page hits' has averaged around 8,000 per month, but our current technology does not allow us to translate this figure into an exact number of visitors. The nature of visits to the website is likely to vary widely, from those who will view one or two pages regularly, for example to see local bird records, to those who will make perhaps a one-off, or occasional visit, but will view many pages, to find out about our Group and its activities. Our best estimate, taking account of these extremes, and everything in between, is that our website is visited by between 750 and 1,000 individuals per month. Therefore, it is and will continue to be a very important and readily accessible route for disseminating information about our Group, its activities and the wider conservation message.

If you have any comments, positive or negative, on the website or its content please let us know by contacting David Tolliday 01625 432105 or email website@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk

CAN YOU HELP?

Help needed for the Garden Party and Plant Sale at Bonis Hall on May 8th. Can you help on the day or supply goods for it?

We need

Sales assistants for plant stalls, sales goods etc.

Plants, cuttings, flowers etc. for plant stall.

Cakes, biscuits, scones, jams etc to sell or serve.

It would be nice to offer cakes etc which are in the recipe book for people to sample—they may then buy the book.

If you are willing to do some baking then please contact Trisha Thompson on 01625 526546

If you can help on the day please contact Margaret Ward on 01625 860338

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Happily, it will not be too long before our woodlands are filled with the full gamut of birdsong following the arrival of migrant warblers, flycatchers and redstarts. First of each species to arrive are the males who will be busy immediately setting up breeding territories and displaying in the hope of attracting mates. Whilst out this weekend, I noted that chiffchaffs were in good voice but I have yet to hear a willow warbler. More interestingly, Nick Chambers told me that the first pied flycatcher arrived back at Coombes Valley last Wednesday, so I am sure that we can expect to see the main influx of migrants shortly.

It is not only a busy time for birds; your Committee is currently making preparations for the Group's 25th Anniversary 'Garden Party and Plant Sale' and, of course, the Annual General Meeting. I hope that you will join us at Bonis Hall and make a great success of this, our first, and hopefully not last, Garden Party at this superb venue made available to us by courtesy of McCann Erickson, Manchester and their CEO, Sue Little.

We promise you some innovations at this year's AGM but you will have to come along to find out what they are. If any of you have interesting slides or digital photographs of birds or wildlife that you would like to share with other members of the Group following the AGM, please contact David Tolliday (01625 432105).

Our other activities this coming month, which include visits to two RSPB Reserves within the North West England Region, also deserve your support. Looking past the AGM, there is still plenty going on with a number of 'Showing Birds to People' Events and Evening Walks culminating in a 'Dragonfly Safari' in July. Why not join us for one or more of these events and enjoy with us a pleasant walk combined with interesting and relaxing birding.

Ray Evans
Group Leader and Chairman of Committee

GARDEN PARTY AND PLANT SALE

The Group's Garden Party and Plant Sale at Bonis Hall is not only an occasion to buy quality plants at bargain prices, but is also an event for the whole family. As well as being able to buy cakes, jams, and plants, there will also be a Nature Walk with Philip Widdows. Afternoon teas will be on sale in McCann Erickson's comfortable cafeteria for those needing a rest from all the buying or shade from the sunshine.

The Hall, a Grade II listed building built in 1830 as a Dower house for Adlington Hall, is situated in a wooded area with a pond and sweeping lawns. It also boasts a hedged garden and greenhouses.

BONIS HALL
BONIS HALL LANE (the B5358, which is off the A523 Macclesfield to Poynton road)
PRESTBURY

on
Sunday, 8 May 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm

We would like to thank McCann Erickson for kindly providing the facilities of Bonis Hall.

BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH – RESULTS FOR CHESHIRE

The house sparrow retains top spot in Cheshire gardens according to the results of Big Garden Birdwatch 2005 with an average of 3.65 birds seen per garden compared with 4.4 in 2004. Starling numbers have continued to decline both nationally and locally. In fact, the starling dropped to number three position in Cheshire having been overtaken for the first time by blue tit. The average numbers of all top ten garden birds seen were down on last year possibly due to the prevailing weather conditions during Big Garden Birdwatch weekend as many observers commented that numbers of birds were reduced compared to normal.

Cheshire bucked the national trend with a 20% increase in the number of participants to just over 9,000 from the 7,500 who took part last year.

The most widespread species nationally this year was the blackbird, recorded in 92% of all gardens, with house sparrows and starlings seen in 68 and 53 percent of gardens respectively. The feeding survey indicated that blue tits were by far the most common bird to be seen at bird tables and feeding stations. However, as peanuts were provided in 70% of gardens surveyed, this may not be too surprising!

The major cause for concern from this year's survey is the further decline, after a slight increase in recent years, in song thrush numbers. For the first time, this red-listed species has dropped out of the top 20 garden birds whereas in 1979 when Big Garden Birdwatch began it held 7th place.

THE JOYS OF TETRADING

The year has come full circle: it is spring again, exactly one year since I started my survey work for the C.A.W.O.S. breeding and wintering bird atlas. Time for reflection and time for anticipation.

I was late joining the scheme and consequently took on a tetrad that no-one had volunteered to do: from Morley Green, both sides of the new runway of Manchester Airport and through to Cotteril Clough on the Ashley Road. You would think that this was an area showing little promise, but I was surprised at my findings. My best find was when a tawny owl flew up from a perch in the area near the new runway. I scanned around and sitting on a branch were two fluffy young owls. As I watched them they sidled along the branch until they thought that I could not see them any more, one facing me and one with its back to me, they went to sleep.

The biggest surprise was in a moment's lull when no aeroplanes took off from the old runway, it was quiet and a grasshopper warbler was reeling from a little tree on a rough patch of ground.

Finding the ponds that had been dug as compensation for building the new runway was another highlight. At first they were very quiet, no birds to be seen; but on a sunny Sunday lunchtime, I stopped by one to have my lunch and it came alive with hundreds of damselflies, darters, chasers, and an emperor dragonfly, starting a new interest for me.

Lapwings are always a pleasure to see displaying over the fields and to find one well-grown chick running around a field in which there were horses, with the parents still up wheeling protectively around was lovely and unexpected as the chance of survival was slim considering the amount of corvids around. I had seen one gooseander last spring, so I was hoping for them wintering on my patch but not so—disappointingly. However, a stonechat in the winter survey was a nice find and two little owls in a territory which would be good for breeding. I had only ever seen one little owl before so this makes me look forward to the new breeding season which is almost upon us.

If this has made you think I could do that, or has made you interested enough to take on a tetrad it is not too late. There are still two breeding and winter seasons to go and still tetrads that have not been covered at all. C.A.W.O.S. are crying out for extra help, especially if you could do some of the more country locations around south Cheshire or Macclesfield.

Please contact Brian Dyke on 01625 525936

Or David Cogger on 01606 832517

Trish Thompson

OUTDOOR MEETING AT MARTON MERE, LYTHAM ST ANNES, NEWTON MARSH AND RSPB MARSHSIDE, SUNDAY 20 MARCH 2005

It was fine but with a cold wind when we met up at Lawson Road, Blackpool. Even before everyone had arrived, Hugo found the first wheatear of the day on the rough ground nearby, a sure sign that the spring influx of migrants and summer visitors was under way. Graham took us across the fields to Marton Mere, initially to a group of small trees on the edge of the reserve. Intent peering through the branches soon located two long-eared owls, much to everyone's delight. We carried on round the mere, with several reed buntings singing in the bushes, and another wheatear on a neighbouring field. From the bridge over the mere outflow we could see a group of swans two fields away: were they all mutes? No, there were three whoopers among them, probably having a last feed before heading north to Iceland. We carried on to the hides on the south shore of the mere, so that we could scan the good selection of waterfowl, including wigeon, pochard, goldeneye and several dozen shovelers. There were also some cormorants with their white breeding patches, and a brief view of a water rail. More summer visitors were to be seen in the form of sand martins, and Ray claimed that he even saw an early swallow!

Goldeneye by Busby



From Marton Mere we moved on to Fairhaven Lake at Lytham St Annes, where Graham Clarkson of the RSPB's Ribble Discovery Centre gave us a short talk about the Ribble Estuary, its importance to birds, and the work that the RSPB and its partners are doing there. We walked round the lake to the dunes, where yet more wheatears were in evidence, together with stonechats. On the mudflats the tide was a bit too far out for us to see many waders, so we moved on to Newton Marsh near Freckleton. Three weeks earlier, Graham had seen big flocks of golden plover and black-tailed godwit there, but this time we were unlucky, though it was good to hear a skylark singing overhead.

We thus decided to move on to RSPB Marshside on the south side of the estuary, near Southport. Here some saw a peregrine, and we all added several ducks to our list, including gadwall and pintail. However, the best birds were the waders. There were lots of golden plovers and black-tailed godwits, many in breeding plumage. There were also redshank, dunlin, ruff and snipe. The highlight, however, was the 14 or more avocets, those beautiful symbols of the RSPB.

So a great day was had by all. We had seen between us about 68 species of birds, but we had also learned a lot about the importance of the Ribble Estuary to the birdlife of Britain and Europe.

Hugo Jones and Graham Palmer



Tawny owl chick digitised by Mike Thompson

EASTER IN THE CAIRNGORMS

Rob and I packed our skis and crampons, but when we arrived in the Cairngorms for Easter, we found that a few days of warm winds had stripped the mountains of nearly all snow. However, we did have our binos and 'scope so there was still plenty to keep us occupied.

First day out we walked up the beautiful Ryvoan valley and onto Bynack Mor peak where we surprised a mountain hare standing out in its white winter coat. We also had some beautiful close views of a pair of golden plover in full breeding plumage.

We had hoped to see the capercaillie lekking, however, the only feasible place to view them easily is from the RSPB Loch Garten hide, but this wasn't open yet as the ospreys had only just arrived and hadn't started nesting. However, we did get up early on Easter Sunday to look for black grouse lekking, which can be seen from the road near the Abernethy forest. In the cold morning light amongst the clumps of heather we could hear the distant bubbling calls of the black grouse. Then a cock appeared on a low ridge and started flashing its white tail feathers and sure enough its rival popped up a few feet away and started jumping up and down in an excited manner also displaying its impressive tail. A third black cock appeared but couldn't compete with the two original combatants, so slunk off to a safe distance. We didn't notice any females watching this impressive display, but as they are so well camouflaged they could have been sitting quietly nearby.



Black grouse by John Busby

No golden eagles, ospreys or crested tits were seen this year, but we did have close views of snowy and eagle owls, capercaillie, wildcat, pine marten and bison, but as you've probably guessed, they were all in the Highland Wildlife park at Kingussie!

WOOLSTON EYES OPEN DAY

There are 35 black-necked grebes back at Woolston already this year!

If you would like to see them or have a conducted walk around the Eyes come along to the open day on June 26th.

10:00am until 4:00pm.

Free admission and parking

Thellwell Lane, Warrington

For further information: www.woolstoneyes.co.uk

Or telephone: Les Jones 01925 821757

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group will take place on Tuesday, 10th May 2005 at 7.45pm in the Senior Citizens' Hall, Duke Street Car Park, Macclesfield.

In the event that formal election procedures become necessary, please be aware that only paid-up members of both The RSPB and the Macclesfield Local Group are eligible to vote. To ensure fair but speedy voting, on presentation of both membership cards (or evidence of their existence) you will be issued on arrival with a coloured card. This card should be displayed in your raised hand on each occasion when registering your vote.

NOMINATIONS FOR OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

At the Group's Annual General Meeting (AGM) last year, the Group Leader and Treasurer were elected for a one-year term only. Therefore, in accordance with the Group Constitution and Local Groups Manual, nominations were invited for these positions. The only nominations received by the 11th April 2005 closing date were for the present incumbents and these nominations will be forwarded to The RSPB North West England Regional Office for approval.

Nominations are invited also for positions on the Committee. Following Chris Sennitt's retirement at the AGM (see Newsletter – February 2005) there will be two vacancies. Additionally, five current members of the Committee (in addition to Group Leader and Treasurer) will be seeking re-election either because they are at the end of their five-year term or because they were elected for a one-year term only at last year's AGM. The closing date for nominations for Committee is Tuesday, 3rd May 2005 and so far, six valid nominations have been received.

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, Margaret Ward along with signed letters from those proposing and seconding the nominee.

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.)