



for birds  
for people  
for ever

# The Heron



## Newsletter - March 2005

### FOR YOUR DIARY

**Sunday 13 March: Special Event - AN INTRODUCTION TO BIRDWATCHING**

at Pikelow Farm, School Lane, Marton. 10.00 am

This all day event is for anybody new to birdwatching. There will be talks on binoculars, telescopes, bird books, computers and birdwatching, digiscoping, twitching, where to go birdwatching etc, followed by a walk around the farm and viewing from the bird feeding stations. (Bring your camera).

Please book in advance as numbers are limited. The event is free but please bring a packed lunch. Contact: David Tolliday 01625 432105

**Sunday 20 March: Outdoor Meeting - MARTON MERE, BLACKPOOL**

At Marton Mere we shall see various wildfowl and passerines, and hopefully

Long-eared Owls. If we're really lucky, we may even see a Bittern! At

lunch-time we'll move on to the RSPB's new Ribble Discovery Centre at Lytham

St Annes, so that we can look for shorebirds and raptors on the estuary and

at Lytham Moss.

Depart Duke Street Car Park at 8.00 am for an all day trip.

Leader: Graham Palmer 01625 420179

**Sunday 3 April: New Event - Cheshire Wildlife Trust presents TRENTABANK WILDLIFE DAY from 11.00am to 3.00pm** at Trentabank Reservoir, Macclesfield Forest, SK11 ONE. Admission FREE. There will be plenty to see and do with undercover displays, live exhibits & activities for all the family.

The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group will be assisting by showing visitors the nesting herons from the dam and nature reserve while our RSPB Wildlife Explorers will be making nest boxes. For further details phone: CWT 01270 610180

**Tuesday 12 April: Indoor Meeting - HOMELIFE OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE IN THE HIGHLANDS OF SCOTLAND** by Terry Pickford

**Saturday 16 April: Outdoor Meeting - LOGGERHEADS COUNTRY PARK**

Depart Duke Street Car Park at 8.00 am for an all day trip.

Leader: Ray Evans 01625 432635

**Sunday 24 April: Coach Trip - RSPB LEIGHTON MOSS**

\*\*\*\*\*Please note change of venue\*\*\*\*\*

Organised by Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group

Depart at 8.00 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow

Cost: £12 - £15 per person, dependent upon numbers.

Contact: Tom Gibbons 01625 520317 or Angela Legge 0161 483 4629

**Saturday 30 April: Outdoor Meeting - THE HIDDEN HAUNTS OF RSPB COOMBES VALLEY**

A visit to parts of the reserve that are not open to the general public.

Meet at Coombes Valley Visitor Centre at 8.30 am

Leader: Nick Chambers, Warden. Contact: Ray Evans 01625 432635

### DID YOU KNOW?

Pigeons are the only birds that can suck. All other birds scoop water in their beaks and tilt their heads back to swallow water, but pigeons can use their beak like a straw.

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Just when all of us, including the birds and animals, thought that spring had arrived early this year, the last two weeks have shown that we were a little premature and winter still had a sting in its tail. However, by way of compensation, the resulting wintry conditions have brought large numbers of fieldfare and redwing to feed in the fields around Macclesfield and siskins have finally arrived in some gardens. Nevertheless, as part of the Group's continuing contribution to 'Operation Tree Sparrow', Group members have been braving the wet and cold to put up nest boxes on a number of farms in the area where supplementary feeding is being undertaken also.

On the subject of feeding the birds, I am pleased to be able to report that David Taylor has kindly agreed to take over as Birdfood Officer when Chris Sennitt retires at our AGM in May after 20 years in the role. We are most grateful to David for providing storage space at Pikelow Farm for bulk supplies of birdfood during the past season and this arrangement will continue. Furthermore, at David's suggestion, not only will birdfood be available at Indoor Meetings but also, by arrangement, directly from Pikelow Farm.

On behalf of the Group, I wish to express my sincere thanks to David Tolliday for successfully applying for two 'Action Earth 2005' grants for the Group, details of which are reported elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Please note in your diaries the date of our Annual General Meeting. We trust that you will endeavour to come along and play your part in shaping the future of your Group.

**Ray Evans**  
**Group Leader And Chairman of the Committee**

### MY FAVOURITE BIRD

Trisha and I were discussing our favourite birds when I realised that it was impossible to name just one; so I arrived at a list of arbitrary categories.

#### Bird of prey

We were on holiday with fourteen other birdwatchers, all trying to find red kites. One suddenly appeared in my binoculars. I must have held my breath for ten seconds as the bird flew over the nearby fields, so close that binoculars were almost unnecessary.

#### Garden Bird

A difficult one, but long-tailed tits just win—they have so much of the 'Aaaaaah! Factor.

#### Farmland Bird

The lapwing is so exotic with its colours and crest that I think it is almost a tropical-looking bird.

#### Wildfowl

Another difficult one, but a drake smew is a beautiful bird and takes first place among wildfowl.

#### Wader

I never tire of watching sanderlings running back and forth with the waves, just like clockwork toys

#### Town bird

A strange category, I'll admit, but I had to mention the pair of pied wagtails that live in the centre of Wilmslow.



Lapwing Dove Tolliday

*Mike Thompson*



### Reminder !!!! Plants

If you are sowing early 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. On Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2005, we will be delighted to take any surplus plants off your hands



### 'Bring and Buy' Sale

Through your generous support at last month's Indoor Meeting, our annual 'Bring and Buy' Sale raised £76.55. Thanks are due to all of you who 'brought' and/or 'bought' goods but especially to Clare Mortin and her assistants for running the stall on the night and subsequently arranging for the disposal of unsold goods to worthy causes.

## CHALK AND CHEESE

I had two fantastic birdwatching trips around the end of the year - firstly in December when Jean and I had 2 weeks in Goa. This was the first time for us in this part of Asia and it was wonderful to experience the culture, the people, THE FOOD, the traffic but most of all the feast of birding on offer. With the benefit of two great local guides we went to many well-known sites and the birds came thick and fast - at first it was frustrating trying to do some identification myself - very difficult to try and find something in the ID book, when you don't even know what family the bird is in! But the guides were superb, helpful and patient and very skilful. Soon, our confidence grew and the enjoyment increased accordingly. At the end of the trip we had seen 236 species. We are really looking forward to returning.

Our second trip was back to The Gambia and as usual, this lived up to its reputation for tremendous birding. Despite having been on 3 previous trips I still managed to see many birds I hadn't seen before taking my Gambian total closer to the 300 mark, emphasising the excellent potential of the country.

However, in between these trips, Jean and I spent Christmas with our daughter in Germany. She lives in a small village in the wine producing area, some 60 miles south of Frankfurt and very nice, too. Naturally, I took my binoculars but what a real disappointment. Despite being in the countryside, the fields around the village were virtually completely devoid of birds - a couple of blackbirds, the odd magpie and crow and basically that was it. The fields were largely open with very few hedges or trees and clearly, the area was just not attractive for birds - what a shame and a warning to show how things may come to be with intensive farming with no consideration for wildlife. What a comparison to our other trips. The only bright spot was when we went into the main city park in Mannheim and there we saw a large flock of ring-necked parakeets which have colonised the area.

**Tom Gibbons**

## Brambling Invasion

It was interesting reading Tom's article 'Chalk and Cheese' on how bereft of birds the area was in Germany where he spent Christmas, and then a couple of days later I received the following e-mail from a friend in the South Manchester Ringing Group:-

"Message from EuroBirdNet 28th February 2005. "A massive invasion of bramblings (*Fringilla montifringilla*) is taking place along the hills of the Ruhr Valley between Bochum and Duisberg. Today I have seen seemingly never ending ribbons of birds swirling through the crowns of the beech forests. No serious attempt at an estimate can be made here, since each calculation is between 1.5 and 5 million bramblings. Two days ago, West German Television broadcast news of approximately 1.3 million in the south of Essen. This invasion started about 29th January, the first hundreds of thousands of bramblings being reported from the woods near Muelheim. Ornithologists in the mountains of the Sauerland in Germany calculate their wintering birds in the region of 200,000 to 250,000 these are now missing as half a metre blanket of snow covers the earth."



*Brambling by John Busby*

This got me wondering where these places were as my knowledge of geography is not good. On looking at the map I discovered the Sauerland is in the north west of Germany and the birds there have moved slightly west into the borders with Holland. If this accounts for 250,000, I wonder where all the other millions have come from. Obviously many places have had worst snow falls this year than is normal, but how do they all know to go to Holland? Another one of those fascinating questions related to bird activity, which is why I find them such wonderful creatures.

Professor David Norman (now an RSPB Council Member) told me that it is well documented that bramblings are well-known for their occasional massive flocks on the Continent, with several years having reports of 20 million or more in a single roost, and a roost of 70 million was recorded in Switzerland in the winter of 1951/52. Pretty impressive.

**Trisha Thompson**

### DID YOU KNOW?

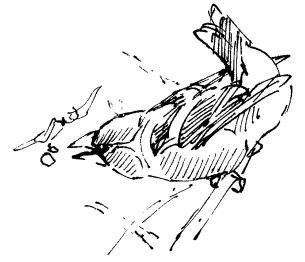
Female swallows select a mate on the length and symmetry of his tail.....so size does matter!!!!

## A DEDICATED BUNCH OF BIRDWATCHERS

March's Newsletter contains reports of three outdoor meetings. Although they have been to a variety of venues, they have one thing in common: the bad weather. Yet despite the unpromising start to the day, the meetings were highly successful. I can only put this down to the Macclesfield Group Members being a tough, hardy, and dedicated bunch of birdwatchers!

## OUTDOOR MEETING AT CAER HÛN AND CONWY (ALSO LLANFAIRFECHAN AND PENSARN) SUNDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2005.

It was snowing as we met in Duke Street car park, but we trusted the weather forecast and set off at 8 am to meet others of the Group at RSPB Conwy, where the weather was bright and sunny! In total there were 24 people, and Trish Thompson was in charge. At her request we consolidated into the minimum number of cars and drove south down the Conwy valley to Llanbedr-y-cennin near Caer Hûn. We walked just past the church and took up position to scan the trees. Our target? Hawfinch. One or two people got a short glimpse of these heavy muscular finches almost immediately, but for most of us it was other birds that made their appearance: chaffinch, greenfinch, bullfinch, robin, thrushes, tits, nuthatch and goldcrest in the trees and hedges, while overhead flew a stock dove, a buzzard and a croaking raven. Then two birds flew between trees and an almost simultaneous cry from David and Graham signalled that the target was again in view. Graham managed to get his 'scope on one perched hawfinch for a few seconds before it disappeared. A bit later two more were seen in flight, and most people got at least a glimpse.



Hawfinch by John Busby

We then went on to Llanfairfechan promenade for some sea-watching at high tide. Immediately we could see lots of red-throated divers, and some common scoters. Great crested grebe and eider were seen, and red-breasted mergansers flew past. Graham was still studying the scoters through his 'scope, and one seemed to have a large yellow bulge at the top of its bill. Could it be? Yes, it was a black scoter (the American subspecies of common scoter). Others rushed to confirm the diagnosis, and Trish, who was on the point of setting off back to Conwy, came running over to get her first ever view of one. We soon all decided to move on, but not before some of us had seen a pair of dippers in the stream that runs down to the sea there.



Short-eared owl by Dave Tolliday

We returned to RSPB Conwy and spent an hour or so there, seeing many different ducks and some waders, particularly lapwing, oystercatcher and curlew. Several water rails also made an appearance, and the scrub produced reed bunting and stonechat. Finally we moved on to Pensarn to look for snow bunting. Unfortunately we didn't find any, but we did increase our wader list to include dunlin and ringed plover. Also notable was a flock of ten or more pied wagtails! A few of the group also went a bit further on to an industrial estate where a Richard's pipit had been reported. They did see it (or rather just its head), but also had excellent views of several short-eared owls.

So we had an excellent day in North Wales, seeing or hearing 80 species/subspecies. Our thanks go to Trish and Mike Thompson for pioneering and organising the day's activities. If you've not been to one of our outdoor meetings or our joint coach outings with Wilmslow Guild, then do come along and join in the fun!

**Graham Palmer**

## SHOWING BIRDS TO PEOPLE—RIVERSIDE PARK, THURSDAY 27TH JANUARY 2005

Despite the rather cold damp winter morning, we were delighted to find that no less than 14 people had turned up to this event, especially since 12 of these were strangers to our local group. (One lady had travelled from Sale to attend).

After ensuring that all had binoculars, issuing sets as required, a brief introduction and safety briefing were given by Roger (Bollin Valley ranger), and Ray (Local Group Leader).

The walk fairly quickly turned productive, and we were soon able point out some of the different features of the "little brown jobs" and "titmice" flitting around.

It wasn't long before we were able to show excellent views of a Kestrel, which, seen through the telescopes, produced the "Ooohs!", and "Wowws!" which we have come to enjoy when showing birds to people.

The Feeding Station maintained by Roger, did us proud, with sightings there of Blue Tit, Great Tit, Nuthatch, Chaffinch, Bullfinch and Jay, and to everyone's delight a small Siskin flock feeding in the nearby Alders. The rain stayed off, and in all some 30 species were seen and identified, leaving all our visitors well pleased with the morning.

Quote of the day: "I have walked this valley a hundred times, but I must have had my eyes closed".

Our thanks to all who came, and to Roger for his background information on the Bollin Valley Project.

**Gordon Howard**

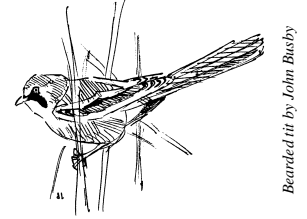


Kestrel by John Busby

# BLACKTOFT SANDS AND FAR INGS WITH THE WILMSLOW GUILD BIRDWATCHING GROUP

## SUNDAY 6TH FEBRUARY 2005

Heavy rain prior to departure contrasted with bright spring-like conditions in Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire for the joint coach outing with the Wilmslow Guild Birdwatching Group. It was the Macclesfield Group's first visit to Far Ings (near Barton-on-Humber) - a small and interesting Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust reserve comprising four small freshwater lakes with islets, formed from old clay pits. The lakes are stocked with coarse fish and partly surrounded by old meadows and scrubland. Well-developed reedbeds are home for bittern and bearded tits - the former showing well as it came out from the reedbeds but the latter seemingly absent today. The reserve hosts a wide range of bird species, views from the hides including goldeneye, pochard, shoveler, little Grebe and tufted duck - all present today, as were reed buntings and tree sparrows at the feeding station. Kestrel, sparrowhawk and tree creeper were also seen. A few redshank and wigeon were present at the River Humber, which adjoins the northern boundary of the reserve. Five cormorants rested on a tree branch nearby and recent records included a smew, which unfortunately did not appear for us.



Bearded tit by John Busby

Hen harrier by John Busby



The well-known RSPB reserve at Blacktoft Sands seldom disappoints though we may not always see all the birds we expect there. This great area of reedmarsh and lagoons near the confluence of the Rivers Ouse and Trent is well known for hen and marsh harriers, bearded tits, hosts of wintering geese and lesser wildfowl and waders and much else. Outstanding today was a female marsh harrier quartering over the reedbeds and alighting at the reedbed edge, where it was closely approached by two inquisitive mallard. A female hen harrier and short-eared owl were seen and a few white-fronted geese and spotted redshanks were found by the Ousefleet hide area. Other observations included small numbers of teal, up to 50 wigeon, little grebe, shelduck, various greylag geese, dunlin, a common snipe, golden plover and over 500 lapwings - many at rest on adjacent fields. Reed buntings and tree sparrows were on nearby hedgerows.

Overall a good day was enjoyed by all, but a full day at Blacktoft Sands is really necessary to obtain the best from this splendid reserve.

**Ralph L Cole**

## ENVIRONMENT AGENCY ACTION EARTH 2005

The Environment Agency and Community Service Volunteers have organised Action Earth 2005 to encourage volunteers to be involved in practical environmental projects in England and Wales. This campaign runs from 1 January 2005 to 5 June 2005 and it is hoped that 750 projects will be organised nationwide. Grants of up to £50 are available for each project.



Howard Rowley with one or two (dozen?) nest boxes made by the Wildlife Explorers as part of the Operation Tree Sparrow project.

Our groups have been awarded two grants:-

The RSPB, Macclesfield Local Group's grant is to purchase a ladder and tools to help with the Operation Tree Sparrow project. If anybody would like to be involved in this project, which will take place on a number of different dates, please contact Rob Cameron on 01625 619861 or email [conservation@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk](mailto:conservation@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk).

The Macclesfield RSPB Wildlife Explorers' grant was to purchase hazel, bird cherry and wild cherry saplings for planting a hedge along the Middlewood Way. This event took place on Saturday 5 March and with the help of the Macclesfield Borough Council Ranger Service, who provided 850 hawthorn saplings, a length of hedge measuring approximately 50m was planted.



Rob Cameron helping putting up nest boxes made by the Wildlife Explorers.

**If you would like to know more about the wildlife Explorers please contact David Tolliday on 01625 432105 or email [explorers@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk](mailto:explorers@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk)**

## **RECYCLE YOUR OLD MOBILE PHONE**

If you have recently upgraded your mobile phone, don't bin your old one. RSPB Wildlife Explorers have teamed up with 'Recycling Appeal' to recycle them. Your old phone could end up being used in the developing world by people who don't have an ordinary phone. RSPB Wildlife Explorers will receive up to £10 for every phone that is recycled.

Please bring your old phone to any of our Indoor Meetings or give it directly to David Tolliday 01625 432105.

## **WANTED!!!**

### **OLD BINOCULARS AND TELESCOPES**

Do you have an old or unwanted pair of binoculars or a telescope collecting dust in a cupboard? Anything that is slightly out of alignment or just in need of a good clean can be put to use in a worthy conservation or education project somewhere in the world, where it will be gratefully received. All you have to do is just bring any binoculars to one of our meetings and we will do the rest. Since the Second-hand Binocular Donation Scheme started in 1985 more than 5,000 pairs have been donated to around 90 countries, mainly in Europe and Africa but more recently to India and Indonesia. Further details of the scheme can be found at: [www.rspb.org.uk/birds/whatyoucando/secondhandbinocular/index.asp](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds/whatyoucando/secondhandbinocular/index.asp)

## **MACCLESFIELD CAMERA CLUB**

Annual Exhibition 2005

*Wildlife of Cheshire*

by

David Tolliday

Macclesfield Library

**8.00pm on Monday 11 April 2005**

## **NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The Annual General Meeting of The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group will take place on Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2005 at 7.45pm 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 and Treasurer were elected for a one-year term only. Therefore, in accordance with the Group Constitution and Local Groups Manual, nominations are invited for these positions. Nominations should be submitted in writing to our Secretary, Margaret Ward along with signed letters from those proposing and seconding the nominee. As it is mandatory that The RSPB NWRO approves all nominees for these positions, the closing date for nominations is Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2005 to allow one month for formal vetting and interviews to take place before the AGM on Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2005.

Nominations are invited also for positions on the Committee. Following Chris Sennitt's retirement at the AGM (see above) 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, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2005.

For details of submission rules and procedures please contact any member of the Committee.

**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.)