

# NEWSLETTER

Winter 2017  
Editor: Tony Bates



## RSPB New Forest Local Group



*Let's keep in touch on your terms*



**“Saying yes will keep you in touch with everything you love about the RSPB’s work and our cause”**  
says RSPB Chief Executive Mike Clarke

The RSPB has a fantastic track record of achieving amazing results for nature. And we couldn’t do this without the tremendous support given and actions taken by our members and supporters. This includes you, our fantastic Local Group members. Together, we do great things for nature.

Now we’re asking our members and supporters to **“Say Yes to the RSPB”** and opt in to hearing from us on their terms. It’s about them having more control over their relationship with us. It’s about strengthening our connection.

We need existing members and supporters to opt in before May 2018 (when new rules come into effect) and give their express permission for us to contact them. If they don’t, we won’t be able to keep in touch directly about our work and developments, about getting involved, and about supporting the RSPB in other ways – for example, through volunteering, supporting an appeal or taking part in an activity or campaign. We will be able only to contact those people about their membership and/or in their existing role as a volunteer.

As a member of a Local Group, your support is invaluable to the RSPB. We'd love you to "Say Yes" and tell us how you want to hear from us in the future. Were we unable to contact you or ask for your help when nature needs it, our ability to work for nature would be greatly diminished.

If you're an RSPB member and receive winter's Nature's Home, make sure you read the letter from Mike and make your opt-in choices online, via our dedicated phone line or by filling in and returning the paper form. If you've already made your choices, thanks very much.

If you aren't a member, as an active supporter you can make your opt-in choices now. Go to [rspb.org.uk/yes](http://rspb.org.uk/yes) or call 0300 777 2610 (open Monday-Friday, 9am-8pm, calls charged at standard rate). Please also help us by encouraging family and friends who are RSPB members or supporters to make their choices too.

The passion and commitment of our members and supporters keeps the RSPB going in our work for nature. Saying "Yes" will keep us strong. And please do the same for all those other nature conservation charities you might support. We need to stay together to help save nature.

Thank you!

*[Photo credit: Kingfisher Yes image by Andy Astbury/Fotolia]*

## **DATE WITH NATURE**

The RSPB will be running Date With Nature from the New Forest Reptile Centre again in 2018. It will start at the end of March and until September, with a training day for volunteers prior to its commencement. This year, the New Forest Local Group has been approached to determine whether we would be able to take a more active role, possibly running the centre for a couple of days each week. It has been suggested that the thrust for 2018 will be less on recruitment to RSPB and more on providing information to the public on local wildlife issues, particularly on the problem of disturbance to ground nesting birds, which has been a major concern of the Forestry Commission and National Park Authority since the early days of the project.

The local group currently has seven volunteers, but would like to hear from others who are interested in being involved. Please speak to a committee members at a walk or indoor meeting or use the contact form on the website if you would like to participate [ [http://www.nfrspb.org.uk/ forums-8/](http://www.nfrspb.org.uk/forums-8/) ].

# GARDEN BIRD SURVEY

July - September 2017

Once again there are very few significant changes from the corresponding quarter last year and generally speaking the results for this quarter are quite consistent over the years. However there is one change to note; long-tailed tits seem to have had a good summer and were seen in more gardens (78%) and almost twice as regularly as in the previous year (35.8% of weeks compared to 18.6%), which is also an increase on the previous three years when their frequencies were relatively stable.

We also managed to add one new species to our list of birds seen in our gardens. A whinchat, presumably on its migration to warmer climes, decided to take a rest in a Pennington garden and stayed long enough for the lucky observer to view it through his binoculars while consulting his field guide. One of the New Milton peregrine falcons also visited a garden on one occasion, whilst they were also seen flying over quite often. Other rarer visitors included a raven, a red-legged partridge and a lesser black-backed gull. A red kite was seen flying over Pennington and the same person also reported hundreds of rooks flying over several times presumably to a nearby roost. She also saw over a hundred sand martins flying over in late August; possibly these were hunting a swarm of flying insects.

For the first time in several years a house martin was recorded but in only one garden as were swifts. Swallows were present in three gardens with more being seen flying overhead; one lady had swallows nesting and they produced two broods. Sparrowhawks continue to make occasional visits to our gardens with over a third of us reporting them; I suspect that they may visit us a little more often but they are in and out so quickly that we do not catch sight of them.

One lady in Lyndhurst reported seeing six great spotted woodpeckers in her garden at the same time; can anyone beat this, but I suspect that you will need to increase your number of bird feeders! Siskins were not seen in many gardens but where they are seen they are very regular visitors and so they get into the birdweeks table and not the gardens table.

Other birds seen were: chiffchaff (9 gardens); siskin (8); herring gull and jay (7); marsh tit and pied wagtail (6); feral pigeon, black-headed gull, tawny owl and willow warbler (4); swallow, rook and pheasant (3); grey wagtail, blackcap, tree creeper and grey heron (2); goldcrest, mistle thrush, swift, buzzard, garden warbler, lesser black-backed gull, peregrine, whinchat, house martin, red legged-partridge and raven (1 garden).

**Table 1: Percent/Birdweeks**

1	Robin	97.0	3
2	Blackbird	95.8	2
3	Wood pigeon	94.9	1
4	Dunnock	92.0	4
5	Blue tit	88.7	5
6	Collared dove	77.5	7
7	House sparrow	75.3	8
8	Great tit	74.8	6
9	Goldfinch	70.0	9
10	Magpie	59.4	10
11	Starling	56.0	11
12	Coal tit	49.2	14
13	Chaffinch	48.1	12
14	Greenfinch	40.5	15
15	Nuthatch	37.4	13
16	Carrion crow	36.6	17
17	Long-tailed tit	35.8	22
18	Great spotted woodpecker	32.3	19
19	Jackdaw	29.6	16
20	Wren	21.8	20
21	Stock dove	18.9	21
22	Song thrush	18.7	18
23	Bullfinch	17.1	-
24	Siskin	14.3	24
25	Feral pigeon	12.5	25

**Table 2: Percent/Birdgardens**

1	Robin	100	1
1	Blackbird	100	1
1	Wood pigeon	100	1
1	Dunnock	100	1
1	Blue tit	100	5
6	Collared dove	94	7
6	Great tit	94	5
8	House sparrow	91	10
8	Goldfinch	91	9
10	Starling	84	11
10	Coal tit	84	11
12	Magpie	78	7
12	Long-tailed tit	78	17
14	Chaffinch	69	13
14	Nuthatch	69	14
14	Carrion crow	69	18
17	Greenfinch	66	15
17	Wren	66	18
17	Song thrush	66	15
20	Great spotted woodpecker	63	18
21	Jackdaw	47	21
22	Sparrowhawk	37	-
23	Bullfinch	34	-
23	Stock dove	34	24
25	Green woodpecker	28	22

The percentage figure in Table 1 is calculated by adding the percentage of weeks that each observer records any species and dividing by the number of observers. If



an observer records a species for 9 weeks in a 12 week period this is 75% for that observer. If the total of all the percentages for 50 observers is 3000 this gives a percent/birdweeks figure of 60. If half of the observers each record a species for half of the weeks we would get 25% for the percent/birdweeks figure.

The percent/birdgardens figure is simply the number of gardens in which a species has been recorded divided by the number of recorders and multiplied by 100.

The last column in each table gives the corresponding rank position for the corresponding quarter of the previous year.

# UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

*If possible, please car share, particularly on the more distant visits.*

Ordnance survey grid references are given below for car parking areas for the field trips. If you want to convert these to co-ordinates or post codes for your SatNav, enter them into <http://gridreferencefinder.com/>.

## Hayling Oyster Beds Saturday, 3 February 2018

After a couple of year's break, we reintroduced a trip to Hayling Oyster Beds last year. The area is good for shorebirds and wintering ducks and grebes. The highlights of last year's trip were a group of nearly 20 black-necked grebes and a pair of long-tailed ducks. Park at the end of Victoria Road at SU 717 029.

## Arne Monday, 19 February 2018

In recent years, we have visited RSPB Arne Reserve during the summer, when the Dartford warblers are singing and sitting up on the gorse. This year we are trying a winter visit when large numbers of avocet and spoonbill over winter in Poole harbour and often can be seen from the reserve. There is also a chance of seeing both hen and marsh harriers. Take your RSPB card with you to display in your car and get free parking (SY 972 878).

## Acres Down Saturday 3 March 2018

The aim of this field trip is to see goshawks, which should be displaying over their nesting areas at this time of year. However, Acres Down is a good general raptor watch site and, provided the weather is amenable, other birds of prey are certain to be present. It is also a good site for woodlark and Dartford warbler and I've even seen a whimbrel fly over! Meet in the Acres Down car park at SU 268 097.

## Portland Bill Thursday 29 March 2018.

This is an all day trip and we may call in elsewhere on the way back if anything unusual has been reported (we saw two rare American waders at Lodmoor in 2017 and a rose-coloured starling at Ringwood in 2016). Our annual pilgrimage to Portland, in recent years, has been in the autumn to coincide with the autumn migration. This year we are trying for the spring migration and hope for incoming hirundines and other summer visitors and passage migrants. Park at Cheynes Weare car park (SY 693 705). If you find you are arriving early, it is worth stopping at Ferrybridge – there is a toilet there and the mudflats can hold some interesting waders,

## Winterbourne Downs Tuesday, 10 April 2018

This is another RSPB reserve at which considerable work has been undertaken to restore “unimproved chalk grassland”. Apart from singing birds, our visit should coincide with early spring flowers. The car park is at SZ 031 773. We’ve scheduled this as an all day trip with a view to possibly stopping at another site on the return journey.

## Durlston Country Park Monday, 23 April 2018

It’s been a couple of years since we last visited Durlston, where we would hope to see Dartford warbler, fulmar, peregrine, skylark, wheatear, etc. We also hope to find the early spider orchids in flower along the cliff tops. Park at the visitor centre at SZ 031 773.



## TRIP REPORTS

### Keyhaven Saturday, 7 October 2017

Early rain and drizzle was insufficient to put off 18 people from gathering at Keyhaven for the first field trip of the 2017/18 season. With a strong westerly wind blowing, small birds were keeping their heads down as we set off along the sea-wall with the wind at our backs. A flock of 12-15 curlews were foraging on the salt marshes accompanied by a few smaller waders. Meadow pipits and linnets were moving between the salt marshes and the meadows.

Keyhaven Lagoon held several groups of duck. A number of teal were dabbling along the westerly edge, some of the males had almost completed their moult into breeding plumage. Towards the north of the lagoon were a group of eclipse plumage wigeon, while a group of eclipse plumage pintails occupies the centre of lagoon. A few mallard were also around the edges. A further group of pintail flew in lead by a couple of males in breeding plumage. A single Brent goose flew off. On the sea-side of the path a mixed flock of waders was moving around including redshank, dunlin, curlew and grey and ringed plovers. A single female red-breasted merganser was fishing in the ditch between the mud banks. As we were moving off a



spotted redshank flew into the lagoon.



At Fishtail, we found a large number of redshank, a few wigeon, lapwing, coot, grey heron and little egret. A small group of adult Brent geese flew in. The earlier arriving groups of Brent in autumn tend to comprise just adults, with the family groups appearing later. Three little grebe were shadowing the movements of a mallard, apparently using it to aid their hunting efforts. A number of waders were huddled on a mud bar that was quickly being inundated by the rising tide. These included some summer plumage grey plovers, although most had moulted into winter plumage. A single linnet moved from a small bush to forage on the path just a few feet below our position.

Out at sea was a single duck, which took a while to confidently identify. It was clearly a scoter, but appeared to have a white mark on its face, suggesting velvet scoter. But when it finally flapped its all-dark wings, common scoter was confirmed. A number of shoveler were present on Butts Lagoon together with a roost of black-tailed godwits. Cetti's warblers were calling from the reeds. A flock of turnstone were foraging amongst the seaweed along the shoreline.

As we walked inland from the jetty, small flocks of goldfinch and meadow pipits were seen. At the new pond, there were large numbers of tufted duck, mostly hauled out on the far shore. Great-crested grebes were present and the gull roost on the bank held black-headed, herring, greater and lesser black-backed gulls. A male kestrel was hunting to the south of the path.

The final walk back towards the car park added blue tit and long-tailed tit and buzzard to the day's list, while the Balancing Pond held gadwall and moorhen. Just over 50 species were identified and it was good to see our winter visitors returning.

Species list:

Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Brent Goose, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Cormorant, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Buzzard, Kestrel, Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin, Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Spotted Redshank, Redshank, Turnstone, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Stock Dove, Wood Pigeon, Magpie, Carrion Crow, Blue Tit, Swallow, House Martin, Cetti's Warbler (H), Long-tailed Tit (H), Starling, Robin, Stonechat, Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet

## Hengistbury Head Wednesday, 18 October 2017

11 Local Group members met in the rather expensive Hengistbury Head car park on a dull and damp morning, hoping that some passage migrants might be visible in the wooded areas or on the sea. A gull roost in the car park held only black-headed gulls. After walking past Hikers' Café in the direction of the Barn (visitors' centre) a couple of meadow pipits flew over, as did small numbers of goldfinch and greenfinch. A robin was singing in a tree close to

the Barn, and still singing when we returned nearly 3 hours later. A number of house sparrows were active around the building and in the gorse bushes.

The field past the Barn held mostly woodpigeons, while crows flew around the tree tops. Looking over Christchurch Harbour there was a large flock of swans, a group of around 10 Brent geese, a large group of cormorants and a number of wigeon in various locations around the harbour. On the near shore little egret and grey heron were active.

In the wooded area the sound of "crests" was evident, some calls sounding like firecrests, but only goldcrests were actually seen. A single chiffchaff was actively foraging in a holly tree and on the marshes there were little egret, wigeon and redshank. The raucous sound of jays could be heard and we encountered several when we followed a path towards the top of the Head. A female grey wagtail was very confiding allowing close views.



In the gorse bushes on the higher ground there were a number of stonechat. Looking over the sea, a ground of about 14 common scoters flew past heading east parallel to the shore. Shortly, after two kestrel flew past fast and low. A large group of Bournemouth University students were ahead on the path we had planned to take, so we returned on the path the other side of the quarry pool and had good close views of a male stonechat followed by two secretive Dartford warblers.

Linnets and other finches flew past in small groups. There were few birds on the shore around the beach hut area. On the open field before getting back to the Barn, greenfinch and linnet perched on top of the gorse and a green woodpecker was spotted. All in all a pleasant walk in dull conditions.

#### Species list:

Mute Swan, Brent Goose, Wigeon, Mallard, Common Scoter, Cormorant, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Kestrel, Lapwing, Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Magpie, Jay, Carrion Crow, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Chiffchaff, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Robin, Stonechat, House Sparrow, Grey Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnet, Stot, Grey Squirrel

## Warsash and Hook Spit Saturday, 4 November 2017

With an unpromising forecast and a wet start to the day, only four members (and one non-member) arrived in Warsash for the walk.

With a high spring tide still flowing and not due to ease until after lunch, the group set off inland along Bunny Meadows. With the foreshore covered birds



were, initially, hard to come by - a cormorant flying downstream, two little grebe, a buzzard on a dead tree and rock pipit, reed bunting and stonechat providing good views along the sea wall.

Eventually, in the furthest tide-fed lagoon, things improved with large numbers of waders - including stunning golden and grey plover, black-tailed godwit, snipe and others with a range of ducks and gulls. The return to the carpark for a coffee stop was much the same as the outward trip, though little egret were plentiful.

Fed and watered and with a brightening sky, we set off for Hook Spit and the Scrape. With the tide still high nothing was seen until we were beyond the Spit, apart from Canada geese and wigeon on the pond. All except the writer found a great crested grebe off-shore.

The scrape was more productive with a good range of ducks - gadwall, shelduck, teal, wigeon and Canada geese and two female pintail, joined by a single male. As we left the scrape my excellent companions managed to put me onto the great crested grebe (Hooray!) just as 3 female mergansers flew in and landed by the shoreline. We were no more than 100 yards from the scrape when a flock of around 30 more pintail flew over to land there.



We had another quiet return walk to Warsash, slightly enlivened by a kestrel and what was, almost certainly a skylark flying low across the inlet to land (hidden) on the spit. A flock of turnstone flew past us and were found (40 birds) on the shingle beach by the sailing club.

The drive home, like the drive there was done with the wipers going, but we had had a mostly dry and enjoyable day.

Species list (44 birds):

Curlew, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Dunlin, Little Grebe, Grey Heron, Little Egret Black-Headed Gull, Herring Gull, Common Gull, Cormorant, Rock Pipit, Reed Bunting, Pied Wagtail Stonechat, Wigeon, Teal, Shelduck, Brent Goose, Buzzard, Snipe, Starling, Lapwing, Redshank, Crow, Wood Pigeon, Black-Tailed Godwit, Meadow Pipit, Mallard, Magpie, Oystercatcher, Shoveler, Gadwall, Moorhen, Pintail, Canada Goose, Great Crested Grebe, Red Breasted Merganser, Kestrel, Skylark, Dunnock, Robin, Turnstone

## Stanpit Marsh Tuesday, 21 November 2017

17 members and 6 non-members turned up for the walk around Stanpit Marsh and we set off from the car park towards the visitors centre.

Along the path were observed robin, and stonechat while in the adjacent recreation field were magpie, woodpigeon and blackbird.



At the North Marsh were carrion crow, little egret, black-headed gull and curlew.

The most abundant area was observed on the East Marsh with flocks of Brent geese, wigeon, and lapwing. In amongst these were pintail, ringed plover, dunlin and oystercatcher. To the south end of

the marsh were great black-backed gull, common gull, coot and teal.

On the walk from the East Marsh to Grimmer Marsh grey heron, little egret and mute swan were observed in the reed bed and inlets. At Grimmer bank there was another flock of lapwing sitting at the water edge.

From here, we walked towards Purcell Stream. On passing Parky Meade Rail, redshank, teal, black-tailed godwits, and little grebe were seen. At Purcell Stream were meadow pipit, blue tit, long-tailed tit, great tit, magpie, goldfinch, and greenfinch.

On returning to the car park two jays were spotted.

Birds seen:

Robin, crow, little egret, stonechat, pintail, ringed plover, mute swan, wigeon, grey heron, starling, dunlin, Brent geese, coot, great black-backed gull, common gull, oystercatcher, lapwing, black-headed gull, mallard, teal, black-tailed godwit, little grebe, cormorant, curlew, redshank, wood pigeon, meadow pipit, blackbird, long-tailed tit, great tit, blue tit, jay, magpie, carrion crow, goldfinch and greenfinch..

## Pagham and Medmerry Saturday, 2 December 2017

Five of us met at the visitor centre at RSPB Pagham Harbour. The weather started drizzling, but soon brightened into a pleasant if cool still day. Pheasant foraged under the feeders to which a variety of its and finches was visiting. The Ferry Pool hide was closed for reconstruction and so we piled into a couple of cars and set off to start our visit at Medmerry. Stopping at a bend in the track we heard the alarm calls of a green woodpecker, which we found has been prompted by the presence of a male sparrowhawk that settled in a tree in the garden of a cottage.



Further along the track we started seeing yellowhammers in the brambles and bushes surrounding the agricultural fields ... and we kept seeing them, more yellowhammers than any of us had seen before in one place. Other birds with

them included reed bunting a probable corn bunting, redwing, stonechat and house sparrows. A couple of grey partridges were spotted in a stubble field, one facing us clearing showing the chestnut horseshoe mark on its breast. A large flock of probably 100 or more linnets settled in the tops of some small trees when disturbed from their feeding. Alongside them was a flock of over 30 stock doves and a small group of song thrush foraged along a field border. Roe deer were seen in fields on both sides of the track.

A variety of waterfowl were found on the lagoons and lakes closer to the sea including wigeon, teal, pintail, shoveler, mallard, tufted duck, shelduck, Canada and Brent geese. Several grey herons and little egrets stood on the banks and coot and moorhen were present. Waders included lapwing, redshank and greenshank. Feeling peckish we headed back towards the cars, seeing yet more yellowhammer and a kestrel on the way back.

We had lunch in the visitor centre before heading down to the coast at Church Norton. Although at first sight it looked as though there was little there on the very low tide, we soon picked up a small group of bar-tailed godwit on the mud, with larger numbers of black-tailed godwits closer to the main channel. Other waders included dunlin, redshank and ringed plover. In the channel was a solitary velvet scoter and a group of four black-necked grebes.

We walked across the old boardwalk towards the sea where a large mixed flock of gulls, including Mediterranean gull foraged on shore. A single great crested grebe was all that was seen on the sea. A good visit to the RSPB reserves with a count of 70 species seen in the day. The rain started again soon after we started our return trip, so even the weather gods had been kind to us.

#### Species list:

Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Brent Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Velvet Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Grey Partridge, Pheasant, Cormorant, Little Egret, Grey Heron. Great Crested Grebe, Black-necked Grebe, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Greenshank, Redshank, Turnstone, Black-headed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Feral Pigeon, Stock Dove, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Kingfisher, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Redwing, Mistle Thrush, Robin, Stonechat, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Linnets, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, Corn Bunting.

## Normandy and Oxey Marshes Thursday, 14 December 2017

Despite the weather forecast giving a less than 5% chance of rain, a heavy shower passed through the New Forest at 9.30 am, when many of us were on our way to Lyminster. Thankfully, the rain eased to a light drizzle by the time we arrived and then stayed dry for the rest of the walk. Maiden Lane

sometimes provides good birds while waiting for the rest of the group to arrive, but just a lively flock of blue and great tits went through this morning. 15 people finally set off for Normandy Marsh, and were soon rewarded by the first of several sightings of a kingfisher as it flew across Salterns boating lake. The tide was high so there was no mud for waders in the channel, but little egret, pied wagtail, meadow pipit and redshank were on the shoreline. The kingfisher shot past us as we approached Normandy lagoon. Dunlin were



dabbling amongst the teal in a pool, while shoveler, pintail and lapwing were on the grassy bank. On the water were tufted duck, female goldeneye, red-breasted merganser, cormorant and little grebe. A female kingfisher, probably the same one, perched on a fence-post at the side of the lagoon long enough to provide good telescope views for everyone.

As we walked to the corner of the sea-wall, two kingfishers flew off across the inlet towards Salterns Lake, one obvious chasing the other, possibly a territorial dispute. A splendid male goldeneye was spotted towards Oxey Marsh, but he made it difficult to get everyone telescopic views as he repeatedly dived. A very distant peregrine was spotted on the far side of the island but as we watched it took to the wing and was mobbed by a couple of smaller birds. A group of about ten avocets were feeding at the shore side of the lagoon and a greenshank was identified. Scanning the sea produced a seal, but no birds, other than mergansers.

As it was getting chilly in the strong south-westerly breeze, we walked briskly back past the Salterns lake towards Oxey Marsh. A kestrel was hovering in the direction of Hurst Point and a large flock of lapwing had taken to the wing. Above the lapwing was a flock of about 100 golden plover. A number of linnets flew a head of us around Oxey Marsh and a group of spotted redshank were found towards the southerly end of the marsh. A small wader alongside two roosting spotted redshank proved difficult to identify, but as it flew off it showed a distinct white rump indicating curlew sandpiper. Still nothing was showing on the sea.

We headed inland around Oxey Marsh where we followed a flock of linnets. A solitary stonechat sat up on some brambles. Along the path between the fields we had a large flock of mixed Canada and Brent geese with a lone grey heron on our left, while on our right the Brent geese were accompanied by black-tailed godwits and curlews. All the birds took to the wing as a raptor flew through, possibly a peregrine, but only poor views were had. The walk back to the cars provided good views of song thrush and long-tailed tits and a goldcrest was seen by some.





12 of us then retired to the Chequers for lunch and liquid refreshment, satisfied with the 56 species seen that morning.

Species list:

Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Brent Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Cormorant, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Little Grebe, Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Moorhen, Coot, Oystercatcher, Avocet, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Redshank, Turnstone, Black-headed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Wood Pigeon, Kingfisher, Magpie, Carrion Crow, Goldcrest, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Wren, Starling, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Robin, Stonechat, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Linnet

## **SNIPPETS** from *Pete Smith & Chris Robinson*

### Purple sandpipers



Winter is a great time for winter migrants. One of the birds to look out for at this time of year is the purple sandpiper, *Calidris maritima*. There are a couple of pairs that breed in Scotland, but the exact location is a well-kept secret to protect them from egg collectors, but most breed in the northern tundra. In winter, they

disperse and turn up at British coastal sites, but even then mainly on the east coast of Scotland. However, a few do visit the south-west (mainly Devon and Cornwall) and some come to the south coast of Hampshire, Sussex and Kent. Just at the moment there are about 15 – 20 in and around the Milford, Keyhaven and Pennington area.

A dumpy bird, just larger than a dunlin, they have distinctive orangey legs and an orange-yellow beak with a black tip. When they are around, they are not excessively shy. The ones photographed were at Milford near the Café on a busy Sunday afternoon. There were lots of people and dogs, and children throwing stones into the sea (why do they do that?) but the purple sandpipers didn't seem at all bothered, foraging on the rocks just off shore. Others have been reported along this stretch of coast, so keep your eyes peeled and you might well see them.



## Be more successful, grow a longer beak!

The British love of feeding birds may have caused Great Tits to evolve longer beaks than their counterparts in Europe according to an academic study.

A comparison of over 3000 birds in the UK and the Netherlands established genetic differences in terms of beak lengths. Differences had evolved over a short period and could be down to higher numbers of garden bird feeders in the UK (the UK spends twice as much on bird food as mainland Europe). Those with longer beaks were more healthy and productive.

So how long before our great tits start to get beaks like wading birds such as redshanks? Then they could really demolish peanuts!

## Egrets

In the 1970s and 80s those of us of a certain age were expecting a rare avian visitor to take up residence – namely the cattle egret. This remarkable bird had colonised every continent except Antarctica without any intentional human aid, earning it the reputation as the most ‘invasive’ species known. They were in Europe, just over the Channel, so it was just a matter of time, wasn’t it? Well, no. The little egret beat it by some years; they have been breeding down here for over 30 years!

But they are turning up again, so keep your binoculars peeled as they may turn up in a field near you very soon. Unlike their other heron relatives, cattle egrets are simply not as tied to aquatic habitats, feeding mostly on worms, insects and other invertebrates, and preferring the company of large herbivorous mammals. We, sadly, don’t have elephants but cattle will do just as well. The two were at Pennington on 5 November 2017, but there is a steady stream of sightings now within Hampshire. Last year they bred down the road in Somerset, so fingers crossed.



The same goes for the great white egret, turning up in greater numbers all the time. The one pictured was at Testwood Lake reserve (on 4 January), where they have had more than 10 at a time recently, though they have also been at Keyhaven Lagoon this year. There is also a long-term resident great white at Blashford.

This is now the season to see bitterns, Testwood claimed one recently, and over the years Blashford seems to get at least two most years. Not as easy to spot as egrets (obviously), but watch those reeds, you might be lucky!



## Saving for a rainy day

A member of staff at the BTO was surprised to find a cache of peanuts in her pillowcase!

Further investigation showed the culprit to be a nuthatch which was removing peanuts from a feeder in her garden and storing them in her pillow!

Nuthatches are one of several species who store food for the winter. They tend to defend the sites where they have stored food and thus lose less food to pilfering, unlike some birds that leave their caches of food and rely on memory to find them again.

Jays are famous for burying acorns – research has shown that they may bury as many as 5000 acorns. Dominant birds will move their stored acorns frequently and steal those of subordinate birds. Some acorns can be buried a long way from where they are gathered but most are stored within a few hundred yards. It is thought that up to 75% of stored items are found by the brightest birds.



*[Editor's comment: Jays are very important in the natural propagation of oaks as they do not damage the seeds when they cache them, unlike squirrels that pierce the acorns during their caching.]*

## 'Exotic' breeders

The Harris hawk is a North American raptor, similar to our buzzard, which is a popular bird for falconry. Inevitably, a few escape from time to time and there are a number of free flying birds around the country. Occasionally, two birds of the opposite sex will encounter each other and breeding attempts have been made at least two being successful. There are also four records of them pairing up with buzzards and raising hybrid young. Buzzards can be variable enough in plumage without producing hybrids with Harris hawks!

There are a number of species kept in collections which have escaped and bred in the wild. These include helmeted Guinea fowl, Reeve's pheasant, Indian peafowl (peacocks), various duck and red-breasted geese.

'Exotic' birds or escapees don't usually get reported by bird watchers so are probably more widespread than is realised so if you see a strange bird it is worth thinking 'Is it an escape from a collection?' A few years ago there was a Chilean Flamingo wandering around these parts – made you blink when a large pink thing suddenly appeared!

## Fabulous Phalaropes

Very few phalaropes breed in the UK, so very few ringing records are available (and none from overseas). Hence, very little is known about the life of these tiny waders when they are away from their breeding grounds on Shetland and the Western Isles.

However new technology has enabled tiny geo-locators, which record the bird's position by a combination of light levels and time, were placed on ten red-necked phalaropes. One of the birds was successfully recaptured a year later and the geo-locator removed and the information downloaded.



This revealed an amazing 1600 mile migration across the Atlantic into the Labrador Sea, then down the east coast of America to Florida. The bird then crossed over Central America and remained east of the Galapagos Islands for the winter. On its return in April it followed a similar but more southerly route back.

It remains to be seen whether all our breeding red-necked phalaropes take this route or do some birds join up with the Scandinavian population and do their routes change according to weather and local storms.

The technology is improving all the time so watch this space for future updates!

## Want to be a high flier?

If you want to be a high flier perhaps you should be a ruddy shelduck.

It has been found that ruddy shelduck can fly at altitudes of over 22000 feet on migration between wintering grounds south of the Tibetan Plateau and their breeding grounds north of the Himalayas. Fifteen birds were tagged and it was found that their average altitude was just over 18000 ft

Migrating ducks in Europe have an easy time by comparison!

## Little Terns enjoy bumper breeding season

RSPB research has shown that more than 600 little terns were successfully fledged in Britain in 2017 making it an excellent year for the species.

Although their population has declined by 18% since 2000 a survey of key sites revealed that 1077 adult birds raised a total of 617 fledglings.

These tiny birds (half the weight of a Blackbird) lay one to three camouflaged eggs on the beach, often close to the sea. This means that they are very vulnerable to tidal surges and to their well-camouflaged eggs being accidentally trodden on, so work is being carried out to provide nesting sites for them well above high tide level and this seems to be having an effect.

## INDOOR PROGRAMME

**14 February 2018**

**Wildlife Wanderings from Penguins to Puffins by Richard Coomber**

Richard is a member of the Local Group and has been a volunteer for the RSPB for more years than he cares to remember. He has also been a tour guide for Ornitholidays taking bird groups around the world. Always an entertaining speaker, this is one not to miss.

**14 March 2018**

**Wildlife of a Working Forest by Mike Read**

Local resident and exceptional photographer, Mike's talk focuses on the New Forest which is both a working forest with commercial forestry and grazing as well as being a refuge for some incredible wildlife.

**11 April 2018**

**Inspired by Birds by Peter Holden MBE**

A visit from RSPB's Peter Holden is always a treat. An author, conservationist, brains behind the Big Garden Birdwatch, Peter will talk about his love of birds

*All images by Chris Robinson or Tony Bates unless otherwise credited*

The RSPB is the UK's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again. We play a leading role in BirdLife International, a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations.

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