

Sheffield Bird Study Group

BULLETIN



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www.sbsg.org

Bulletin

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Dates for your diary

INDOOR MEETINGS

Wednesday - 7.15 pm – 14th May - Lecture Theatre 5, Arts Tower, Sheffield University

Richard Dale will talk to us on the **Mauritius Kestrel Project**. Richard has been a member of the group and committee for several years, primarily acting as secretary and annual report editor – except when he's working in Mauritius! Tonight we will hear of Richard's experiences coordinating the fieldwork monitoring this famous species – now recovered from a precarious low of just four individuals in 1974. While concentrating on Richard's work with the Mauritius Kestrel, the talk will also cover other aspects of conservation work and birding in Mauritius, including the continued recovery of other formerly critically endangered species such as the Pink Pigeon and Echo Parakeet.

Wednesday – 7.15 pm – 11th June - Lecture Theatre 5, Arts Tower, Sheffield University.

This is the one you have all been waiting for! **Members' Night!** A chance to show off your own photographs and share memories of exciting birding moments with the group. If you would like to take part in this, please contact any member of the committee.

FIELD MEETINGS

For details of Minibus Field Meetings please contact Paul Medforth at meetings or on 01246 418120 or 07968 092032.

Sunday 19th April 2008 6.00-8.00am – Local Field Meeting - Dawn chorus at Glen Howe Park

Another joint event with the Sheffield City Council Park Rangers to explore this park in the north-west of Sheffield. This time of year is good for identifying a range of resident species, and some early summer migrants, by their songs and calls. This trip will be ideal for beginners who wish to familiarise themselves with common woodland birds. Meet at the car park off Green Lane in Wharnccliffe Side (SK296943). Non-members welcome.

For information on this field trip contact Helen Hipperson on 0114 2862513

Saturday 10th May, 4.30 – 6.30 am. Local Field Meeting - Dawn Chorus at Ecclesall Woods

It may mean an early start but a Dawn Chorus in May is something everyone should experience. Paul Medforth has therefore agreed to abandon the mini bus for a day and lead this trip to a more local destination. Ecclesall Woods has an excellent range of species and Paul will help make sense of the different songs that will be heard. Other woodland specialities such as woodpeckers and Nuthatch should be present and the heronry will be active. Meet at the entrance to the woods opposite Beauchief Gardens on Abbeydale Road South (SK324817) at 4.30 am. Non-members welcome.

For information on this field trip contact Paul Medforth on 01246 418120.

Sunday 11th May, 8.30 – 10.45 am. Summer Migrants at Padley Wood

The fifth year running that Ron Blagden has offered this popular trip to Padley. Concentrating on identification by both sight and sound, summer migrants may include Pied Flycatcher, Redstart and Tree Pipit. Padley is one of the must visit sites in Sheffield in the spring so definitely one not to be missed. Meet at the roadside parking at the top end of Padley on the road to Grindleford (SK258800) at 8.30 am. Non-members welcome.

For information on this field trip contact Ron Blagden on 01246 58352

BIRDING IN THE SHEFFIELD AREA

What to look out for in..... APRIL

April is the main spring changeover month in the area. Many winter visitors can still be seen, summer visitors return to breed, and there is the chance of unusual migrants passing through the area.

This can be a good time to see OSPREY in the area. Usually adults, they do not hang around as they move quickly north to breed. (Birds seen in May are often non-breeders, which take a more leisurely journey back to Scotland and Scandinavia). The reservoir chains to the west of Sheffield are a good bet, as well as the Derwent Valley and surrounding moorland.

Weather associated with "fall" conditions on the coast (light east/south-easterlies with rain) can have a similar effect here, particularly at eastern lowland sites. Places such as Poolsbrook C P and Rother Valley C P are worth visiting to see if species such as WHITE WAGTAIL and YELLOW WAGTAIL, or *littoralis* race ROCK PIPIT have been grounded. These conditions produced the unforgettable Red-throated Pipit at Poolsbrook in April 1996.

Towards the month end, the overland migration of ARCTIC TERNS is noted through the area. Although water bodies to the east, such as Thrybergh CP, Rother Valley CP, Harthill Res and Treeton Dyke are the most likely spots, parties of birds have been seen drifting slowly north over open moorland to the west of the area.

Although not the peak month for wader migration, April can be a good month to catch up with BAR-TAILED GODWIT, a scarce bird for the area. The last week of the month has often produced a gorgeous summer plumaged adult, with sites such as Thrybergh C P, Rother Valley C P, Carr Vale N R and Middleton Moor worth a visit.

A species which is moving north is WOODLARK, with records of overwintering birds, and breeding not far from the south-east corner of the recording area. April would be your best chance of finding a singing bird in suitable habitat before the mass arrival of summer migrants drowns it out!

April is a great month for going out to get those "early" and "late" dates for your year list. A trip to Carr Vale, Old Denaby or Pit House West in the last week should give REED and SEDGE WARBLER, whilst the Peak District woodland edges will produce REDSTART and TREE PIPIT. Flocks of REDWING and FIELDFARE can be seen, often to the west of the area, with Middleton Moor particularly good for the latter. Any flocks of BRAMBLING at this time should hold males in their stunning breeding plumage.

Finally, a possible sign of global warming. When I started birding in the area over thirty years ago, an April sighting of SWIFT was rare indeed; now, they are widespread throughout the area before the end of the month.

Ron Blagden

DATES TO NOTE – OTHER GROUPS

Time/Date	Group	Location	Speaker	Title
7.30 pm 1 st May	RSPB Local Group	Central United Reformed Church	Dr Ian Rotherham	The Wildlife of South Yorkshire's Lost Fens – Past, Present and Future

Please note the RSPB Local Group do not hold meetings from June to August – their next meeting will be in September.

Please note that DOS do not hold meetings until the Autumn.

The Lecture

The Secret Life of the Nightjar

The January speaker was Phil Palmer, who has a lifetime of ornithological experience, which includes being a leader of birdwatching tours, and writing the acclaimed *First for Britain and Ireland*. He has been watching Nightjars in Nottinghamshire since childhood, and in the 1990's was involved with a radio-tracking project in the Sherwood Forest area and on the Thorne and Hatfield moors. Hatfield is easier than Thorne for nocturnal bird-watching as there is less water and bog to fall into in the dark, and the limited vegetation makes the birds easier to see.

The Nightjar we see in Britain is actually the "European Nightjar" and is one of about 80 species of Nightjar and Nighthawk that are distributed worldwide. All species are of a similar size. They are well camouflaged, but males often have white spots which are visible when they display — and are necessary for species that live their lives in darkness. Although very similar in appearance, the species are differentiated from each other by particular features such as elongated feathers, variation in calls, etc. Nighthawks differ from Nightjars in that they are not quite so strictly nocturnal.

Most bird species have two requirements for breeding: a safe nesting site and a supply of food. For Nightjars, the nest is a scrape on the ground, and the ideal is a slightly raised area on sandy soil; they do not like cold damp boggy ground. In Sherwood Forest, the preferred nest site is in bracken, with heather second choice. For food, they need access to deciduous trees such as oak, willow or lime where they can find ample supplies of nocturnal flying insects, particularly moths, in and around the upper canopy on still nights; conifers do not support the same level of insect life.

Budby Common formerly supported up to eight pairs of Nightjar, but the introduction of sheep caused loss of eggs and chicks through trampling. The birds have now moved into the surrounding conifer forest (clear fell in conifers plantations offer good nesting habitat) and fly back to Budby Common for food. There now seems to be a move to introduce some cattle, and these should pose less of a threat to ground nesting birds than sheep do.

At Hatfield there are vast open areas where peat has been extracted, but this has now mercifully stopped. In the midst of the devastation is a small area of the original moorland, where the (heroic) owner refused to sell to the peat companies. This area was doubtless appreciated by many bird species, but was not used for nesting by many Nightjars until clearings were created artificially. Also, for reasons that are not understood, they will not cross extensive open spaces to get to food. However, there is a band of birch trees surrounding the peat extraction area, and the Nightjars fly along these corridors and nest close to these. Thanks to the peat companies, Hatfield moor offers far from ideal nesting sites for Nightjars, but unfortunately they always return to the same area to breed, and will endure a second-rate location rather than move six or seven miles to a better one.

At Thorne and Hatfield, efforts are being made to introduce sphagnum moss in order to regenerate the peat, and other vegetation is gradually recovering. This has encouraged other bird species such as Black-headed Gull to move into areas which were previously the preserve of Nightjars, so the Nightjars are breeding in amongst the newcomers.

Fortunately, both Thorne and Hatfield moors have an abundance of insect life, so there is no shortage of food. Nightjars feed from just after sunset until about midnight, but this is ample time for them to get all the food they need. The preferred method of hunting is to operate like a flycatcher from a perch, but they will also fly around with their mouths wide open, trawling for insects. Bristles around the mouth help prevent the catch from escaping.

It has been estimated that on Hatfield moor, up to 80% of first nesting attempts are predated. Fortunately, Nightjars generally lay two clutches and, because the vegetation is now higher, the second is more successful with up to 80% surviving. The main predator is the fox, but there are also a lot of adders on these moors, and they will predate young Nightjars. In Sherwood, crows pose a considerable threat and dog walkers have caused losses too.

The normal plumage of a male Nightjar is to have three white spots on each wing, and white tips to the outer tail feathers. However, some birds have only two wing-spots, and one individual had four (he also had more than average amount of white on his tail, plus white under-tail coverts, and appeared to attract a lot of females). Even amongst the two-spotters, there is much variation in the shape and size of the spots, and in fact no two birds are the same. Females are split about 50-50 into those with no white at all on them, and those which have creamy coffee-coloured wing spots that can appear whitish. It is virtually impossible to tell the age of a Nightjar, even when held in the hand for ringing, despite what the ringing books say. Some first-year birds do retain some juvenile markings after their first moult, but many do not.

Another feature of the Nightjar anatomy is the smallness of the feet and legs, doubtless linked to the fact that they do not walk about much, nor do they use their feet for catching insects. Photographs of roosting Nightjars often show them with half-closed eyes. Although they normally have their eyes wide open, they will half-close their eyes to a slit if danger approaches as a wide-open beady eye can attract the notice of a predator.

In some areas of Hatfield moor, the birch trees are too dense for Nightjars to breed, but clearings have been created, the clearings have been colonised by heather, and these are much used by the Nightjars. It was in one clearing at Sherwood that Phil erected his hide for the radio-tracking project, so he could watch the nightly activities of his pair of Nightjars. During the course of the project he also saw, and in some cases ringed, Long-eared Owls (yet another predator of Nightjar chicks), Nightingales and Woodcocks.

The key to the Life of a Nightjar is the male's roosting place which in the south of England is reportedly in a tree, but in the study area was normally on the ground (although a bird may sometimes turn up in unlikely places such as garden sheds, washing lines, fence posts, etc.). When the male returns from Africa in spring, he returns to the roosting place he used at the end of the previous season, and awaits the return of the female. Provided this site is not disturbed (i.e. not a washing line ...) it will be used as the first nest site. Whilst the female is incubating the first clutch of eggs, the male will roost in the vicinity, and again, provided there is no disturbance, this will be used as the second nest site. As before, the male will roost in the vicinity, and it is this site that he will return to the following spring. The crucial feature of a roost site is that there must be no disturbance: he will stay put throughout torrential rain, thunderstorms, etc., but as soon as danger threatens, he will abandon that site and find a new one. The roost site thus acts as a test bed for the nest site.

Normally Nightjars lay two eggs on consecutive days, and start incubating after the first, so one chick is a day older than the other. The eggs are white, as is typical of nocturnal species, but with brown markings to give a little camouflage. There is considerable variation of patterning of eggs. But each female retains the same patterning throughout her life.

Once the eggs are laid, Nightjars do not do much during the daytime; they may shuffle around a bit, or sunbathe, but the female does not leave the nest scrape. If an intruder approaches an incubating female, she will fake a broken wing, in order to draw the predator away from the nest. If grabbed, she will open her massive gape and hiss like a snake.

Throughout the nesting period, the male leaves his roosting place at dusk, flies to the nest site, and calls to the female. She then flies up to meet him briefly before going off for about 50 minutes to feed, before returning to continue incubation. The eggs are usually left alone whilst she is away, although the male may occasionally incubate them.

The first egg hatches after 18 days, and the incubating female sits with slightly raised tail so that the chicks get a little air. This behaviour is very useful to the observer, who wishes to know hatching dates, but does not wish to flush the sitting bird. As soon as the first egg hatches, the chick will tug feverishly at the female's beak, to prompt her to regurgitate an insect mush. She will ram as much of this as she can down the throat of the chick and, when the chick is full and can take no more, she will re-swallow the rest, and try again after about 40 minutes.

Initially the female will brood the chicks, and the male brings in the food, but when they are about 7-8 days old, both adults will hunt for food. There is keen competition between the chicks when an adult arrives with food, but in fact there is always enough to go round, and it is extremely rare for one chick to survive, and one to die through lack of food. Food is mostly moths, but remains of ants and beetles have been found in dissected

corpses of adults. Surprisingly, Phil has witnessed a beetle making its way across a nest scrape, over the body of the sitting bird, and out of sight, all without interference; this suggests the bird did not recognise it as food, and they feed only on flying insects.

When the chicks are left unattended, they will keep absolutely still (except when the food arrives). If a predator threatens, they will not move until the last possible minute, when they will suddenly stretch up as tall as they can, with mouth agape, and will finally jump up at the intruder, hissing like a snake. Although this behaviour would probably not deter a fox or stoat, it might serve to ward off a less dangerous foe, or prevent accidental trampling.

Weather is of crucial importance before the chicks get their adult plumage at about 14 days, and a heavy rainstorm at the wrong time will wipe out the entire chick population in that area. It is imperative that the chicks are not disturbed when they are at the vulnerable stage, so ringing must be done when they are 9 days old.

The radio transmitters were fitted to adults only, and were attached to the central tail feather using superglue. Extreme care was taken with this operation, as a spot of glue in the wrong place could be fatal. The transmitters are very light in weight, the battery (a watch battery) being the heaviest part of it. The whole thing weighs about one gram, which as a percentage of a 70 gm bird is not likely to affect it. When the bird has its first moult, the transmitter is lost with the feather, so the whereabouts of the bird is no longer traceable.

The chicks fledge at about 18-19 days, by which time they are roughly the same size and shape as the adults, and initially stay within a few hundred yards of the nest site, and are still fed by the adults. Phil found one fledged chick that had fallen into a ditch and worn away part of all its primary feathers in an effort to scramble out. He returned it to the nest scrape where it was fed by the adults, and new feathers had grown after about 10 days. A moth diet is a very nutritious one.

No one yet knows exactly when the young are left to fend for themselves — and of course, they will have to undertake their migration to Africa. Adults whose nest has failed too late in the season for them to re-lay, may leave at the end of July, but normal departure times for adults and young is mid to late August with late breeders staying to early September. There have been birds recorded on the coast as late as October, but these are likely to be from the continent

Phil was thanked for his most stimulating and entertaining talk. We always enjoy talks by people who have been actively involved with research, and Phil's breadth of knowledge, passion for his subject matter, wonderful photographs, and humour had given us a very memorable evening.

Wendy Thomson

Chris Falshaw 1934 – 2008

In January we lost one of the great characters of bird watching and conservation in the Sheffield area. It was my privilege to have known Chris and to have worked alongside him on a range of activities over the last fifteen years or so.

Most of us will recall Chris from his frequent ten-minute cameos at indoor meetings, informing, enthusing, inspiring and cajoling us into “volunteering” for whatever forthcoming BTO survey needed completing. How many of us have succumbed to Chris’s gentle art of persuasion? Much of my back catalogue of survey work has been Chris driven and of course his ability to painlessly twist arms didn’t stop there. More than one of the Committee members in recent years joined after a conversation with Chris. He had a talent for spotting talent. But back to those indoor meetings and my own favourite CPF moment: Chris giving the vote of thanks after Iolo Williams’s talk on Raptors in Wales in 2000. Two of birding’s great enthusiasts sharing a platform. Priceless.

That was just one aspect of Chris’s contribution to birds and conservation locally. In preparing this piece I’ve been looking back through SBSG documents from the mid nineties onwards. Chris’s contribution to the Group and to the wider understanding of birds in our area is so apparent. It was immense.

From 1994 to 2000 Chris worked tirelessly as the Group’s secretary. Amongst his many achievements, he secured a steady flow of funds to the tune of several thousand pounds to support the Group’s activities, using those same techniques of gentle persuasion to secure generous sponsorship for the annual report or to obtain a number of survey commissions for a range of organisations prepared to finance the fieldwork. The same energy and the same ability to call on people resulted in the success of the three regional conferences co-hosted by SBSG: the group’s 25th Anniversary Conference in 1997, “Moorland Birds” in 2001 and “Woodland Birds” in 2003. Chris was the driving force behind each of those days.

Chris of course was very active as the BTO’s Regional Organiser for South Yorkshire for a number of years, recruiting many of us to become involved in bird survey work. But Chris was a foot soldier as well as a chief, out birding and counting with the rest of us but also compiling a whole raft of SBSG reports on the status of birds in many parts of our area; The Upper Derwent Valley, Wyming Brook, Longshaw and Padley, Sheffield City Council’s woodlands in the Peak Park, the North Lees Estate and the Botanical Gardens.

Incredibly, birds were only one of Chris’s interests. Speakers at his memorial service in February told stories of caving, of fishing, of chemistry, of good food and good wine and above all of Chris the family man. Perhaps the fact that nearly two hundred people attended the occasion speaks volumes about the man and the affectionate regard in which he was held. Chris will be greatly missed.

And finally, a personal note. A few years ago Chris, knowing of the work I was doing in the junior schools trying to enthuse youngsters about birds in their area, passed on to me his collection of assorted beaks, skulls, feathers and other bird related items. Many hundreds of eight to eleven year olds have since been intrigued, amazed, amused and occasionally frightened by the contents of the CPF travelling museum. Last week in Brunswick School, Woodhouse they got their first airing of the new season and I’d like to think as the kids gathered expectantly around the desk that somewhere out there, there was the hint of a Chris Falshaw chuckle. And maybe, just maybe, one of those youngsters, inspired by what they’ve seen or what they’ve learned turns out to be a fledgling Falshaw. Now that would be a legacy.

Pete Brown

COMMITTEE CHANGES

As of the recent AGM Margaret Miller and Wendy Thompson have stepped down from their positions on the committee after many years service to the Group; their replacements are Richard Hill and David Williams, both long time members of the Group with a wealth of birding experience and knowledge.

At the subsequent committee meeting the annual committee reshuffle took place, with David Wood taking on the mantle of Chairman of the Group. Many of the other positions remain unchanged, and Margaret Miller retains the tasks of editing the Bulletin and organising our programme of speakers despite having left the committee – all on the committee are grateful for her continued efforts.

As it stands the allocation of positions is now as follows, though some of these may be subject to change as the new look committee settles in.

Chair	David Wood
Secretary	Richard Dale
Treasurer	Ron Blagden
Recorder	Kevin Gould
Conservation	Helen Hipperson
Membership Secretary	Jenny Kingsland
Website Manager	Simon Bailey
Publicity & local field trips	Helen Hipperson
Annual Report Editors	Richard Dale/Richard Hill
Bulletin Editor	Margaret Miller
Breeding Atlas	David Wood/Helen Hipperson/David Williams
Organisation of speakers	Margaret Miller
Committee Minutes	Richard Dale

Whilst these are the main responsibilities of members of the committee, please feel free to contact any member of the committee if you have any queries or concerns about the Sheffield Bird Study Group.

WELCOME BACK

We would like to welcome back two former members into the Group:

Gary James Peter Wragg

We hope that they will find their renewed membership interesting and rewarding.

CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY IN THE SHEFFIELD AREA

The SBSG has been involved with other local organisations in the planning of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) in Sheffield, Rotherham and the Peak District. The LBAPs complement the UK Biodiversity Action Plans by concentrating on regional sites for habitats and species highlighted to be of national conservation concern, as well as focusing on biodiversity that is of importance locally (see www.ukbap.org.uk for further details). For example, urban birds are included in Sheffield's plan, Twite and Lapwing are BAP species in the Peak District, and farmland species are the main avian focus of Rotherham's plan. Each local biodiversity group meets 3-4 times a year and we are currently looking for group members to represent the SBSG at these occasions. The meetings are a good forum to discuss how the group's surveys and records can contribute to the LBAPs. Additional survey opportunities can also arise, and occasionally training in survey techniques is available. Anyone interested should contact Helen by email (helenhipperson@googlemail.com) or by telephone on 0114 2862513.

FIELD TRIP

Lincolnshire, Sunday 9th March

After a dull and inaccurate weather forecast the night before, I was expecting a day of roaming around Lincolnshire in the pouring rain but was pleasantly surprised to find it clear and bright sky that Sunday morning. Getting outside and waiting for the minibus to arrive I saw Jackdaws and Carrion Crows flying northwest from their roosts, and the resident Sparrowhawk was up early and disrupting the peace in the local park as it set off a chorus of alarm calls along Asline road.

Boarding the minibus we picked up the rest of the blurry-eyed birders and set off to Howden's Pullover near Donna Nook in search of a Glossy Ibis. The Ibis has been on the Lincolnshire coast for at least a month and had been identified as wild by the ring on its left leg. The BTO records show that it was ringed in Donana in Southern Spain in June 2006 as a nestling.

Arriving at Howden's Pullover after a short diversion for a comfort break, we made our way down the embankment along to the area where the bird was last reported. The signs of spring were all around with Skylark, Meadow Pipit, and Curlew singing and displaying. Little Egrets were feeding on the marsh and Snipe calling overhead. Reaching a small group of birders looking over the marsh towards one of the pools we quickly found the Glossy Ibis and after a good look we began to scan the rest of the area where we were informed of a flock of seven Lapland Buntings in the ploughed field. A quick scan and to our surprise they were reasonably close and showing very well, allowing clear identification and showing signs of moulting into summer plumage. We then made the decision to move on as things were going well and we headed towards Gibraltar Point with a couple of stops on the way.

Going on the possibility of a Common Crane at Huttoft Bank just south of Mabelthorpe we decided to make this our next destination as it was on route. Arriving at the north end of Huttoft bank we were greeted with the sight of 30+ Whooper Swans mixed in several Mute Swans just by Huttoft pit LNR, but no sign of the Crane so we pushed on south.

As we moved on south checking the small roadside pools we came to a flock of geese in a field just south of Andry Creek. At first glance there was just your typical Embden and feral farmyard geese but closer observation showed several Pink-footed and Greylag geese present. Further scanning of the surrounding pools revealed

Teal, Wigeon, Mallard, Goosander, Little Egret, and Moorhen.

Moving on we passed through Ingoldmells and Skegness quickly whilst admiring the names of and sheer number of hair stylists in the area. Arriving at Gibraltar Point we had a quick bite of lunch before most of the group set off around the reserve. A couple of us took the opportunity to photograph a very approachable Black-headed Gull. After bribing it with our sandwiches and getting some rewarding pictures we then set off to catch up with the group. Grey Plover and Spotted Redshank were seen by most on the salt marsh and a flock of Brent Geese flying over the Wash were given away by their barking calls. Dunnocks, Robins and Wrens were very abundant and in full song in the Dunes as well as Skylarks, Linnets and Goldfinches. On the sea we had a flock of Common Scoter flying north and a single drake Eider just off shore as well as the usual Cormorants and Gulls present. On the shoreline Dunlin, Knot, Sanderling, Curlew, and Grey Plover were busily feeding whilst Sparrowhawk and Kestrel were seen hunting over the dunes. Moving on and checking out the new bird hide between Jackson's Marsh and Tennyson's Sands we found Avocet, Redshank, Pochard, Ruddy Duck, Shoveler and Brent Goose amongst the usual suspects. A closer look on Jackson's Marsh revealed Short-eared Owl and large flocks of Starlings and Woodpigeons feeding on the fields, Pied and Grey Wagtails on the margins on the pools and amongst the Tuftys and Teal we found a well plumaged drake New Zealand Scaup that showed well in front of the hide. This bird has been present since summer last year and was known to have escaped from a local waterfowl collection.

We then headed back to the bus and found a flock of 7 Corn Bunting's in a tree by the car park and had a last minute scan over the salt marsh before boarding the bus and heading home. The journey home produced 2 Barn Owls, one of which was actually posing in a barn window, a Buzzard perched up on a post and several small skeins of geese heading north that were silhouetted in the fading light as the sun set on another enjoyable day's birding. Many thanks to Paul Medforth for organising and driving us on yet another excellent trip.

Philip Ridsdale

LOCAL FIELD TRIPS

Beeley Wood - Sunday 24th February 2008

After meeting in Oughtibridge and setting off alongside the River Don into the woods it soon became apparent that the majority of those present had come along in the hope of connecting with a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Beeley Wood is perhaps the most reliable site of the many in the NW of the area that hold this species, but they can still take some finding at times – no pressure then. On the river were Grey Wagtails and Dippers – including a colour-ringed bird, while the usual woodland birds were present: Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Great Spotted Woodpecker were all found while scanning the treetops for our main quarry. Fortunately, we were not kept waiting for too long: a series of high-pitched kestrel-like notes from the treetops indicating a Lesser Spotted

Woodpecker above us and everyone soon got good views of a female as it foraged on the outer branches of oaks by the river. With the pressure now off it wasn't long before another, again a female, betrayed its presence with calls and a few half-hearted drum-bursts, and this was watched for several neck-aching minutes as it went about its business high in the treetops. We continued our walk through the wood but didn't encounter any further Lessers, though a couple of Green Woodpeckers completed the set for the morning before we retraced our steps and returned to Oughtibridge in search of a well-earned bacon buttie.

Richard Dale

Derwentdale - Saturday 8th March

The weather forecast did not bode well, but driving up the valley past Ladybower and Derwent Reservoirs, the hill tops were clear, although there was a very strong wind from the south-west.

This had the positive effect, however, of making Windy Corner itself unusually sheltered.

Arriving at the viewpoint just before 8.30 am, Richard Dale was already *in situ*, with two brief views of Goshawk already under his belt. However, the first hour or so was pretty quiet, with the weather periodically deteriorating, and then improving again. However, we had good views of Buzzard and Sparrowhawk, and periodic flyovers of the large flocks of Siskin and Brambling currently in the top end of the valley.

Then, far up the valley beyond Slippery Stones, two large birds were spotted. Two Ravens, which were quickly joined by a third. All three then turned their attention to a Peregrine which had appeared from the west, and we were treated to good, if distant views of the pursuit, including the Peregrine attacking one of its tormentors at one stage. We had better close up views of Raven later, with the characteristic “torpedo” body and head, and long,

slightly swept back wings forming a cross-like silhouette.

Our main quarry species was still eluding us, however, despite a couple of large female Sparrowhawks trying to fool the unwary. A sharp eyed observer then picked out a large raptor down the valley, beyond the dam wall - Goshawk. Everyone managed good, if distant, views of the bird as it half-heartedly attempted to display in the buffeting winds. As is often the case, you know when you see the real thing!

Things quietened down again, although a flyover Crossbill was a useful year tick for some. The highlight for many, however, was my shout of “what's that moving east over the ridge?” The answer.... a visibly migrating red balloon, presumably lost by some poor child on the west coast!

Nine members and local birders enjoyed a successful morning, with the weather holding off just long enough.

Ron Blagden

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS AND GIFT AID

Subscriptions for 2008 became due in January. Some subscriptions remain unpaid! This is the last Bulletin you will receive unless you pay by the end of April.

We have a good programme of speakers for this year, and many local and more distant field trips are also in the pipeline. A copy of the Annual Report for the year prior to membership is also included. The subscriptions remain the same at £14 for individual members, £16 for family membership, and £7 for juniors (up to age 16), which I am sure you will see as good value for money. A subscription form is below. To renew, please see Jenny Kingsland at any meeting, or send your cheque payable to Sheffield Bird Study Group, together with a stamped addressed envelope for return of your membership card, to Jenny Kingsland, 52A Riverdale Road, Sheffield S10 3FB. For new members an application form is available at meetings, on the website, by phone to 0114 2660759 or by e-mail to jkingsland@tiscali.co.uk

In recent years there have been changes to Gift Aid legislation, making it easier for charitable organisations to reclaim income tax on the contributions, including subscriptions, made by members. The group is constantly looking for sources of income to offset the increasing costs of running the group, such as printing the excellent Annual Report, (the better it gets, in terms of photos etc, the more it costs) and also room hire for our Indoor Meetings.

Gift Aid is a means by which every basic rate tax-paying member can contribute to the group's income, courtesy of the Inland Revenue (what an incentive!). If you are about to pay your 2008 subscription and have not already filled in a Gift Aid form, please complete the tear off slip below, and return it to any committee member at an indoor meeting or send with subs to Jenny Kingsland by post, or to Ron Blagden, Anselm, White Edge Drive, Baslow, Derbyshire, DE45 1SJ. At the end of the tax year we can then recover 22/78 of your subscription (£3.95). If you are a higher rate taxpayer, you can include the payment on your tax return, and get higher rate tax relief yourself. Please take the time to do this, as we can potentially raise hundreds of pounds for the group.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION 2008 RENEWAL FORM

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To: Jenny Kingsland, 52a Riverdale Road, Sheffield S10 3FB

GIFT AID FORM

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Are you a basic rate taxpayer? YES/NO

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RECENT SIGHTINGS

Mid-February – 31st March 2008

These records are largely unchecked. Those in bold require submission of full supporting details.

Whooper Swan	Numerous records 15th-22nd March as birds passed through the area, including 41 at RVCP on 15th, 59 at Firsby Res on 16th, 33 NW at Linacre Res 17th with 36 NW at Carr Vale NR on the same date possibly referring to the same birds. 27 were at Linacre Res on 20th-22nd March and one was at RVCP on 29th-30th March.
Pink-footed Goose	A period of passage in early Feb included 57 NW at Thrybergh CP on 8th and, on 9th, 70 NE at Wharncliffe Chase, 53 NE at Thrybergh CP and 65 NNE at Grindleford.
Egyptian Goose	The resident pair at RVCP have produced six goslings – a first breeding record for the area, but probably not the last ...
Pintail	A pair were at Barbrook Pools on 19th Feb.
Scaup	A 1st-winter drake and a female were present at Ulley CP to 9th Feb, with the female remaining to 30th March at least.
Red Kite	One untagged bird N, mobbed by corvids, at Redmires Res on 24th March, with one reported at Howden Res on 31st.
Common Buzzard	Six at Ulley CP on 30th March and nine in the Upper Derwent Valley on 31st.
Rough-legged Buzzard	One in the Upper Derwent Valley on 24th March.
Black Grouse	Reintroduced Blackcock at Broomhead Moor and Bent Hills on 30th March.
Water Rail	One present at Thrybergh CP throughout Feb.
Oystercatcher	One at Thrybergh CP on 22nd Feb, two at Carr Vale NR on 28th Feb, two at RVCP on 8th-9th Feb with three there on 15th, two at Langsett Res on 18th March, two at RVCP on 24th and 29th and two at Strines on 30th.
Little Ringed Plover	One at Silverwood Pit Tip on 22nd March and three at Thrybergh CP the following day.
Ringed Plover	Two back on breeding grounds at Parkgate on 10th Feb and three were at Thrybergh CP on 19th Feb with a single there the following day. Two still at Parkgate on 2nd March with one E at Aldwarke SF and two at Silverwood Pit Tip on 9th, one at Parkgate Canal Basin on 16th, two at Thrybergh CP on 23rd and one at Silverwood Lagoon on 26th.
Golden Plover	Larger flocks included 100 SW over Chapelton on 3rd Feb, 150 at Wentworth on 10th Feb and 80 at Carr Vale NR on 28th Feb. The regular flock at Peat Pits numbered 286 on 5th and 200 on 21st March, with a total of 270 feeding there and on nearby Rocher Flat on 25th.
Lapwing	107 were at Middleton Moor on 16th Feb with 40+ at Peat Pits throughout March and at Langsett on 13th.
Dunlin	Singles at Redmires Res on 1st March and Thrybergh CP on 15th.
Jack Snipe	Singles at Waverley Opencast on 7th Feb and Aldwarke SF on 9th March.
Snipe	17 at Aldwarke SF on 2nd March, 14 NE at Blackburn Meadow Nr on 26th March and 12 at Whitwell Moor on 27th.
Curlew	The first returning birds were two NW at Old Wheel Dam and four at Redmires Res on 1st March, while 65 were at Langsett on 13th March with 23 at Middleton Moor on 16th.
Redshank	One at Carr Vale NR on 28th Feb and at RVCP on 15th and 29th March, with three at Thrybergh CP on 15th March.
Green Sandpiper	Singles at Ulley CP on 8th Feb, Blackburn Meadows NR on 15th March and Tinsley SF on 24th March, with two at Tinsley SF on 25th March.

Mediterranean Gull	One at Rivelin Dams on 2nd March.
Little Gull	One in the roost at Broomhead Res 2nd-10th Feb, with presumed same bird in fields near Damflask Res on 3rd Feb. One was at Treeton Dyke on 28th March.
Caspian Gull	A 3rd-winter was at Poolsbrook CP on 24th Feb.
Kumlien's Gull	A 3rd-winter Kumlien's Gull was in the roost at Broomhead Res on 3rd and 9th Feb, with presumed same at Langsett Res on 6th.
Iceland Gull	A 2nd-winter was at Poolsbrook CP on 4th Feb and a 1st-winter bird was at the same site on 24th Feb.
Kittiwake	Adults were at RVCP on 21st and 23rd March.
Ring-necked Parakeet	Singles reported at Heeley City Farm on 9th Feb and Stannington on 28th Feb, with two N at Woodhouse on 14th Feb.
Barn Owl	One seen at Blackburn Meadows NR on 15th and 26th March.
Long-eared Owl	One in the Upper Derwent Valley on 15th Feb.
Short-eared Owl	One near Agden Res on 20th Feb and at Howden Edge on 31st March.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Singles at Carr Wood on 3rd Feb, Bingham Park on 10th, Gleadless Valley LNR on 16th, Hang Bark Wood on 19th, Middlewood on 2nd March and Woolley Wood on 5th March. Two vocal females were in Beeley Wood on 24th Feb for the local field trip and a pair was at Wharnccliffe Side on 18th March.
Sand Martin	Two at RVCP on 8th March were the earliest ever arrivals and the following day saw singles at RVCP and Thrybergh CP and three at Blackburn Meadows NR. 22 were at RVCP on 15th March with three at Thrybergh CP on 16th, ten at RVCP on 24th, three at RVCP on 29th and two at Broomhead Moor on 30th.
Swallow	One at Broomhead Moor on 30th March.
Rock Pipit	One was at RVCP on 23rd March.
Pied Wagtail	40 were at Baslow SF on 2nd Feb and 100 roosted at Canklow on 13th Feb, while an influx in late March saw 74 at RVCP on 21st and 93 there on 23rd, with 42 at Thrybergh CP on the latter date.
White Wagtail	The influx of Pied Wagtails in late March brought four White Wagtails to RVCP on 21st and three on 23rd, while two were in a Lodge Moor garden on 25th.
Waxwing	Four were at Cutthorpe from 15th March; still present on 29th.
Stonechat	Away from the uplands there were singles at Thrybergh CP on 5th March and Ulley CP on 12th, 25th and 27th, with three at Pit-House West on 9th.
Wheatear	One at Pit-house West on 29th March, two at Redmires Res on 30th and a single at Agden Side on 31st.
Ring Ouzel	The first returning bird was reported N of Slippery Stones on 19th March, with a male at Agden Beck on 30th.
Fieldfare	Large numbers in the area included 400 at Wharnccliffe Chase on 10th Feb, 200 at Ulley CP on 12th Feb, 100 at Scholes Village on 21st, 220 at Upper Thornseat on 26th, 100 at Thrybergh CP on 23rd March, 100 at Ladybower Res on 24th, 175 near Wharnccliffe Chase on 25th with 200 at Rocher Head and 92 N at Bamford the following day. 250 were at Upper Hollow Meadows on 30th March and a flock of at least 700 gathered in the Bent Hills/Edge Mount area on 30th-31st March.
Redwing	The largest flocks reported included 90 at Wharnccliffe chase on 17t Feb, 80 at Stublely Hollows on 23rd Feb, 189 at Chatsworth on 8th March and 82 at Glen Howe Park on 27th March.
Blackcap	Single wintering birds visited gardens at Millhouses and Walkley Bank on 4th Feb, Burncross on 7th, Norton Lees on 12th, Nether Edge on 15th and Bents Green on 1st March. One singing at Ulley CP on 14th March was perhaps the first returning migrant.

Chiffchaff	One was singing at Forgemasters Tip on 16th March, followed by more arrivals towards the end of the month with one at Ulley CP on 20th and three there the following day, subsequently birds reported from several sites across the area including five at Mount Darnall, six at Warren Vale LNR and RVCP and nine at Ulley CP on 30th March.
Willow Warbler	One reported singing briefly at Langsett Res on 28th March and one at RVCP on 30th.
Great Grey Shrike	The bird in the Upper Derwent Valley was seen briefly at Cow Hey on 19th March but then remained faithful to an field between Linch Clough and Slippery Stones from 27th-31st at least.
Raven	A flock of 18 at Howden Edge on 31st March.
Brambling	A flock of up to 250 birds was present in the Upper Derwent Valley in the Westend-King's Tree area in March. Scarce elsewhere, with one at Ramsley on 14th Feb, one at Gleadless Valley LNR on 16th Feb, five in a Dronfield garden on 27th Feb, six W to roost at Redmires Res on 4th March and five in a Lodge Moor garden on 24th March.
Siskin	30 at Ramsley on 14th Feb and 40 at Charlton Brook on 23rd March were eclipsed by the numbers in the Upper Derwent Valley, where several flocks of 100-300 birds were present throughout March.
Common (Mealy) Redpoll	One was at Pit-house West on 9th March
Lesser Redpoll	A flock of 80 at Pit-house West on 9th March was the only record.
Crossbill	50 were reported from Foulstone Delph on 16th Feb and one was at Redmires on 30th March, while several pairs were present in the Upper Derwent Valley, especially Hagg Side and Westend-Slippery Stones, in March.
Hawfinch	One was at Chatsworth House on 23rd Feb.

Records were received from the following observers, with apologies for any omissions:

MG Archer, S Ashton, S Bailey, A Bell, RP Blagden, RJ Bowland, K Bower, DM Bye, EO Chafer, RJ Croxton, R Dale, A Deighton, G Featherstone, M Garner, D Gains, KR Gould, RD Hill, J Hornbuckle, G James, Alan Johnson, Ann Johnson, J Kingsland, P Leonard, P Mella, M Miller, N Porter, M Reeder, P Ridsdale, SJ Roddis, J Sherwin, M Sherwin, MA Smethurst, DW Smith, B Spencer, B Steel, D Stables, JM Swift, E Townend, R Twigg, D Warburton, RDR Williams, D Woodriff, Derbyshire OS, Rotherham and District OS, Sorby-Breck Ringing Group and Thrybergh CP Bird Log.

COPY DATE FOR JUNE BULLETIN

The next Bulletin will be issued at the June meeting on 11th June. Please note that any items for inclusion in the Bulletin must be received by Margaret Miller by email to margmiller@talktalk.net or at 14 Worcester Close, Sheffield S10 4JF by Monday 2nd June.