



SHEFFIELD BIRD STUDY GROUP
BULLETIN

Issue 225 December 2014

www.sbsg.org



News and announcements

Over and out...

As mentioned in the previous Bulletin, this will be my last as editor, as I need more time to focus on a Masters degree I'll be working hard on next year.

It's been great to be a part of the SBSG's communications over the last five years, and I'll still be around, updating the group's social media, and I also hope to find time to continue my regular chunk of the Annual Report.

The future of the Bulletin is still under discussion, and we are still looking for a person (or perhaps more ideally, a group of people), to take on the job. There are also discussions if utilising the website more fully for communications, rather than a bimonthly Bulletin, would be a better way to reach members with up-to-date and timely information and articles.

In the meantime there may be a break in Bulletins while this is decided. If you have any offers of help or general comments please feel free to pass them to me at peterjmella@gmail.com and I will let the committee know.

I'd like to thank everyone who has helped me with content over the years, especially regular contributions from John Kirkman, David Woodriff, Dave Wood, Richard Hill, Rod Hinchilffe, Ron Blagden, Simon Bailey, Wendy Thomson, Martin Hodgson, Pete Brown, Paul Leonard, Richard Dale, Mark Reeder, Margaret Miller and David Williams (and apologies if I've forgotten anyone!).

Pete Mella

A treasured volume?

The "Peregrine" event in St George's church on 6 June provided a great opportunity to showcase our Breeding Atlas, and as a result we sold 15 copies on the evening. Other sales and donations at the time took total receipts to well over £400, mostly in cash. I followed my usual practice of pocketing the cash (you'd always suspected that!) and sent a cheque to Ron for the full amount. By chance we were shortly due to pay a likely lad for some home decoration, in cash of course (was I really an Inspector of Taxes?), so we put £300 in a safe place until then. One evening before payment was due, when a certain amount of chaos was going on in the house, a couple whom I didn't recognise came to the door and asked to buy a copy of the Atlas as a present for the man's upcoming birthday. You are probably ahead of me, dear reader. Yes, this was possibly the very copy in which we'd put

the £300 for safe keeping. It was in none of the others we still had in the house when we later began our frantic search, and I can recall no other sales around that time. Why do I not maintain dignity and credibility by keeping quiet about the whole thing? Well, it is just possible that the purchaser (whether that couple or not) has not yet opened the book. I often take some time to open up a new book I've bought. If anyone discovers that they have made a lucky lottery win of that amount, a plain brown envelope pushed anonymously through my letter box would be very welcome at any time. And suggestions for a less risky place to store cash in the future would naturally be welcome also!

Martin Hodgson
(martin@hodgson54.orange-home.co.uk)

Apologies to Martin for running out of space for this in the last issue - PM.

News in brief

Indoor Meeting Venue Change

Good news - the venue for indoor meetings from January 2015 has been confirmed as **Lecture Theatre 3 of the University of Sheffield's Hicks Building, Hounsfield Road**. This venue will provide better screen viewing for all as well as allowing for the larger audiences which major speakers may attract.

Tim Birkhead research funded

The future of Prof Tim Birkhead's groundbreaking, four decade research into the Guillemots of Skomer Island was looking bleak as funding was cancelled earlier this year. However Tim has "crowdfunded" the research, and we are happy to say has reached his target to continue the research for another year, using contributions from over 650 donors. If you want to add to the coffers of this important research, see <https://www.justgiving.com/timbirkheadguillemots>

New members

We welcome new members Dave Reed, Mark Langston, Karon Mayor, Ben Jackson, and Helen & David Egan. Good birding to you all.

Cover photo

This issue's cover photo features a Yellow-browed Warbler at Wyming Brook, by Alexis Gotts (see page 5 for details)

Dates for your diary

IMPORTANT - PLEASE NOTE THE NEW VENUE FOR INDOOR MEETINGS FROM JANUARY 2015

Forthcoming SBSG indoor meetings for 2015

December 10th 2014 - Richard Swales - Antarctica
7.15pm, University of Sheffield Arts Tower, LT5

January 14th 2015 - Pete Brown - Sadness & Splendour
7.15pm, University of Sheffield Hicks Building, LT3

February 11th 2015 - Ron Marshall - Sweden & Swedish Lapland
7.15pm, University of Sheffield Hicks Building, LT3

March 11th 2015 - AGM (including 2014 review of the year)
7.15pm, University of Sheffield Hicks Building, LT3

April 8th 2015 - Jon Hornbuckle - Worldwide Birding
7.15pm, University of Sheffield Hicks Building, LT3

May 13th 2015 - Ray Knock - Ringing
7.15pm, University of Sheffield Hicks Building, LT3

September 9th 2015 - Bill Gordon - Ring Ouzels of Stanage & Burbage
7.15pm, University of Sheffield Hicks Building, LT3

October 14th 2015 - Geoff Carr - Birds of the Dark Peak
7.15pm, University of Sheffield Hicks Building, LT3

November 11th 2015 - Prof John Reilly - Out of Gondwana: The amazing story of birds
7.15pm, University of Sheffield Hicks Building, LT3

December 9th 2015 - Bob Croxton - Raptor passage over Southern Spain
7.15pm, University of Sheffield Hicks Building, LT3

For details of 2015 field meetings, please keep see the SBSG webpage and social media sites (see addresses right).

December Field Meeting - White Peak & Middleton Moor

Weather permitting, this will take place on either Saturday 6th or Sunday 7th 2014 at 13:00.

Date to be confirmed when the weather forecast firms up; if neither date is promising we'll look at the following weekend (13th/14th). We'll meet at Monsal Head, where there's a pay and display car park or roadside parking (SK185715).

From there we'll walk down into Upperdale, one of our best sites for Marsh Tit, before returning to the car park and relocating to Middleton Moor, where we'll attempt to count the Starlings as they come in to roost. Bring your abacus!

See www.sbsg.org for updates of a firm date

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SBSG on the web

Website

<http://www.sbsg.org>

Twitter

www.twitter.com/shefbirdstudy

Facebook

www.facebook.com/

[sheffieldbirdstudygroup](https://www.facebook.com/sheffieldbirdstudygroup)

Azure-winged Magpie: An inscrutable bird?

Driving one day in 1999 in Extremadura, Western Spain, I caught a brief glimpse of a bird out of the corner of my eye, and asked the inane question: "Was that a magpie or a jay?" As soon as the words were out of my mouth I guessed that I'd in fact had my first sighting of an azure winged magpie. And this was confirmed by abundant later sightings, mainly in oak plantations.

Like many others I became intrigued as to how these birds could be found in the Iberian peninsular and in the Far East, with none in between. But not having the stimulus of an SBSG at the time, I left it at that.

My next sightings were in China nine years later, abundant again, but this time mostly in urban parks and the like. The Chinese name is *hui xique*, meaning grey joy-bird. Grey is not the definitive descriptor I myself would have chosen from this photo I took in 2011, but joy-bird is apt, since in Chinese culture all magpies, not just black-billed ones and not just two together as in the UK, are bringers of joy and good luck.

A couple of years ago I had an email exchange with an RSPB official who had written in an article that the twite was unique in the world because of its two disjunct populations, North-western Europe and Central Asia. I gently asked whether she had overlooked the AWMs and received the response that she had excluded them as being introductions to Iberia by medieval Portuguese merchants. Knowing

nothing more on the subject, but wondering why the Portuguese were attracted to this bird alone and had not introduced hundreds of other even more attractive Chinese birds, I nevertheless left it at that again.

Then earlier this year I bought "The History of British Birds" for the deeply intellectual reason that I recognised the names of the authors – the late Derek Yalden and fellow SBSG member Umberto Albarella. In it I read that a cave in Gibraltar had yielded up bones of an AWM dated about 15,000 years before Portuguese sailors began their Far Eastern trade, and that genetic evidence confirmed the Iberian and Asian populations to be distinct. Although the identification of the bones has been challenged, the DNA evidence has not. It can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/azurewing> and suggests that the two populations diverged as long ago as 1.2 million years. This puts it about the middle of the Pleistocene Age, a

period of successive glaciations, and supports the alternative theory that a previously unbroken north Asian and European population became split in two by glaciers. This seemed to me a much more persuasive scenario.

Two other interesting points come out of the DNA comparisons. The Asian population is not a single one but divides into two. And in all populations, the AWM is genetically closer to jays than it is to the black-billed magpie.

Perhaps the question I asked back in 1999 was not quite as inane as I first thought!

Martin Hodgson



Recent sightings

1st September - 31st October 2014

These records are largely unchecked. Records in bold require supporting details.

STAR BIRD **Yellow-browed Warbler** **24th October, Wyming Brook**

Yellow-browed Warblers are great birds to see anywhere in the country, but are particularly good finds inland. This bird, found by Alexis Gotts, was only the ninth for the SBSG area, and the first since 2008. The finder also got a great, clear photograph of a species it can be tricky to pin down.



Sadly this report ends on a tragic note, as Alexis died just before we went to press. He was a well-known figure in Sheffield's alternative music and arts scenes, as well as a keen wildlife enthusiast, and a regular visitor to the SBSG's Facebook page. Our thoughts are with his family and friends at this difficult time.

Black-necked Grebe - A juv was present at Thrybergh CP on 10th Sept.

Whooper Swan - One at Thrybergh CP on 11th October was followed by four SE at the same site on 14th, two N at Orgreave Lakes on 15th, five at Redmires on 16th, and five at Thrybergh CP on 22nd.

Pink-footed Goose - A good number of records from mid-October onwards, with some days showing notable influxes. The highest counts included 380 NW at Ramsley on 11th, 400 NW at Thrybergh CP on 11th, 350 N at Brecks on 15th, 650 NW at Rawmarsh on 23rd, 400 E at Brecks on 24th, and 320 E at Thrybergh CP on 24th.

Canada Goose - Some (unwelcomely) large counts from some sites, including 587 at Rother Valley on 14th October, and 400 at Orgreave Lakes on 24th.

Wigeon - 113 were at Rother Valley CP on 14th October.

Eurasian Teal - 109 were at Middleton Moor on 11th October.

Pochard - 130 were at Orgreave Lakes on 15th October.

Tufted Duck - 346 at Orgreave Lakes on 10th September was a record count for the site.

Common Scoter - A female/imm was at Redmires Top Res on 7th and 9th September,

and a male at Thrybergh CP on 16th. Two males were at the latter site on 15th October.

Red Kite - Singles recorded on various dates, from Derwent Edge, Hutcliffe Wood, Thrybergh CP, Barlborough, Langsett, Manor, Rawmarsh and Catcliffe.

Marsh Harrier - Cream-crowns were at Bamford Moor and Redmires on 7th September, and Rother Valley CP on 14th October.

Rough-legged Buzzard - Juveniles were at Upper Derwentdale on 28th October, and Agden beck on 29th.

Osprey - The latest of the year were at Moscar Cross on 7th September, Langsett Res on 10th, and at Junction 36 of the M1 on 11th.

Golden Plover - Thrybergh CP saw the highest counts, peaking at 500 on 28th October.

Grey Plover - Two circled Orgreave Lakes on 14th September, before flying south.

Lapwing - Peak counts of 500 at Thrybergh CP on 10th October, 160 at Redmires Res on 16th, and 230 at Load Brook on 25th.

Ruff - Single males at Orgreave on 7th and 8th September.

Whimbrel - One was at Redmires Res on 6th September.

Black-headed Gull - 1,045 were in the Langsett roost on 26th September.

Lesser Black-backed Gull - Peak counts of 993 at Lang-

sett Res on 26th September, and 1,400 at Middleton Moor on 26th October.

Yellow-legged Gull - A good run of sightings from the usual sites, with highest counts of four at Orgreave Lakes on 8th and 10th September, three at Redmires Res on 18th September, and three at Middleton Moor on 26th October.

Caspian Gull - An adult was at Langsett Res on 3rd and 5th September, and an adult at Redmires Middle Res on 15th October.

Arctic Tern - Juveniles were at Elsecar Res at Orgreave Lakes on 1st September.

Woodpigeon - Passage began from early October, with highest counts later in the month,



This Barnacle Goose was at Thrybergh CP on 1st Sept (MA Smethurst)

including 2,360 at Rivelin Valley on 20th, 1,125 at Rawmarsh on 25th, and 1,030 at Wharncliffe Chase on 25th, 1,850 at Fulwood on 29th, and 4,550 at Rawmarsh on 29th.

Skylark - 120 were moving S at Silverwood Lagoon on 10th October.

Sand Martin - 130 S at Thrybergh CP on 14th September.

Swallow - The highest counts included 250 at Ecclesfield Dam on 3rd September, 160 at Stannington on 9th, and 100 at Orgreave Lakes on 18th.

House Martin - Higher counts includes 100 at Ladybower Res and Sothall on 2nd September, 200 at Stannington on 9th, and 100 at Canklow Woods on 17th.

Meadow Pipit - Larger counts on passage included 200 SW at Redmires on 22nd September, and 415 S at Rawmarsh on 27th September.

Rock Pipit - A suspected *litoralis* was at Orgreave Lakes on 2nd October, with the site turning up two on 4th, one on 14th, four on 15th, and one on 17th. Redmires saw single birds on 25th and 30th October.

Pied Wagtail - The pre-roost gathering at Middleton Moor reached 120 on 17th October.

Waxwing - Four birds were briefly at High Storrs on 29th October.

Black Redstart - A single bird was recorded at Derwent Edge on various dates between 7th September and 12th October.

Fieldfare - 31st October saw an influx of this species, including 335 SW at Rawmarsh, 588 SW at Redmires, 150 SW at Sheffield University, and S85 S at Thrybergh CP.

Redwing - Larger counts included 370 NE at Norwood on 15th October, 500 S-SW at ulwood on 17th, 365 SW at Leash Fen on 17th, 284 S at Canklow Woods on 18th, 400 S at Silver Wood on 18th, 680 SW at Silverwood Lagoon on 31st, and 231S at Thrybergh CP on 31st October.

Yellow-browed Warbler - One was photographed at Wyming Brook on 24th October (see page 5).

Great Grey Shrike - One was at Leash Fen on 31st October.



This Sparrowhawk was in a Kiveton Garden on 9th October (A Bateman)

Starling - Larger counts included 650 at Owlthorpe on 28th October, 690 at Thrybergh CP on 28th, and 1,215 at Rawmarsh on 29th.

Chaffinch - Larger counts on passage included 143 W at Redmires on 21st September, and 102 W at the same site on 5th October.

Greenfinch - 100+ were caught and ringed at Bradfield Moor on both 5th and 11th October. 241 flew W at Redmires on 5th.

Goldfinch - 120 were at Barbrook Cottage on 9th September, and 162 flew W at Redmires Res on 5th October.

Linnet - Some good counts

included 300 at Onesmoor on 5th September, 200 at Orgreave Lakes on 14th, and 200 at Peat Pits on 28th.

Snow Bunting - One flew S calling at Redmires Res on 25th October.

Pete Mella



This Tree Sparrow was an unusual visitor to a Wharncliffe Side garden on 12th October (A Hill)

This issue's observers, with apologies for any omissions:

CD Abell, C Almond, MG Archer, S Ashton, J Atkin, A Auckland-Moss, A Baley, B Bailey, S Bailey, S Barnes, SJ Barnes, A Bateman, AR Bell, AS Bilton, RP Blagden, K Bower, P Bowker, RJ Bradley, SJ Branch, C Brewster, PL Brown, V Browne, P Burke, R Butterfield, EO Chafer, I Chapman, J Clarke, B Cole, J Crank, J Crooks, RJ Croxton, C Dauris, A Deighton, W Dudhill, H Egan, P Flackett, MG Fenner, P Garrity, S Gauton, KA Gehring, D Gill, A Gotts, G Grant, T Grose, S Guymmer, C Hallam, R Harris, I Hedge, A Hill, AA Hill, RD Hill, DJ Hitchen, A&V Hobson, M Hodgson, J Hornbuckle, K Horton, J Housden, MA Hilett, P Jackson, G James, M Jarvis, Anne Johnson, C Kelly, J Kingsland, N Kipling, K Knowles, M Kramer, MR Langston, P Lawson, P Leonard, F Maddock, JM McGourlay, C Measures, PR Medforth, P Mella, B Merryweather, TH Minskip, D Mowbray, L Nelson, H&M Nichols, MG Oxlade, PH Pearsall, NR Porter, I Purlow, M Purslow, MN Reeder, S Samworth, M Sanders, R Scally, J Sherwin, M Sherwin, A Siddall, D Simmonite, MA Smethurst, AHV Smith, MJ Sweeny, SG Tebbutt, A Thomson, M Timms, R Twigg, C Tyler, SE Vickers, EC Vincent, AD Watson, M Wells, RDR Williams, JB Wilson, P&A Wilson, D Wood, D Woodhead, D Woodriff, Barnsley Bird Study Group, Sorby-Breck Ringing Group, Thrybergh CP Bird Log, BTO Bird Track.