

Sheffield Bird Study Group

BULLETIN



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Bulletin

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Dates for your diary

INDOOR MEETINGS

Wednesday 13th May 2009 – 7.15 pm – Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5

Mike Turton will be giving a talk entitled '**Kamchatka - Ring of Fire**'. Mike is a local birder living just outside the Sheffield area in Wombwell and will be well known to many members. He has been a member of Barnsley Bird Study Group since its formation in 1974 where he has filled many roles including Recorder, Secretary and Chairman and has been very involved with Broomhill Flash, Wombwell Ings as well as what we now know as Old Moor Wetlands. He is extensively travelled worldwide, and in this talk he will tell us about a recent visit to the Kamchatka Peninsula, a spectacular area in the northern Pacific Ocean.

Wednesday 10th June 2009 – 7.15 pm – Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5

The one you've all been waiting for – **Members' Night!** It's the perfect chance to wow your fellow SBSG members with your own photos, and tales of your favourite birding moments. If you would like to take part in this, please contact any member of the committee.

FIELD MEETINGS

Sunday 10th May, 5.30 - 8.00am - Dawn Chorus Walk - Summer Migrants at Wyming Brook

Definitely one not to be missed, we will look for both summer migrants and local residents by sight and sound within this diverse woodland area. Highlights should include Wood Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, Common Redstart and Siskin, with Spotted Flycatcher and Crossbill a possibility.

Meet at the car park at the top of Wyming Brook (SK269858). All welcome, there will be a £2 charge for non-members of the SBSG. For further details contact Richard Hill (rdhill2001@yahoo.com) or Richard Dale on 01142862513 or richarddale9@hotmail.com

Saturday 16th 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. All welcome, there will be a £2 charge for non-members of the SBSG. **For information on this field trip contact Paul Medforth on 01246 418120.**

The Lecture

An Ornithological Feast – How we know what we know about birds

The January speaker was Tim Birkhead, Professor of Evolutionary Biology at the University of Sheffield. He is an international expert on sperm design and sexual selection in birds, and he also runs a long-term population study of Guillemots on Skomer Island, Wales. He has published many books and papers on ornithology and his latest book is entitled "The Wisdom of Birds". This evening's talk covered aspects of three of Tim's areas of interest: early ornithology books and bird-keepers, how sexual selection relates to evolution, and the growth of scientific ornithology.

Tim's interest in the history of ornithology began with a friend's enquiry: What is a Reed Pheasant? Or a Scooper? A Puckeridge? A Beam Bird? Never one to decline a challenge, Tim delved into old books on birds, and found, not only the answers to the questions, but also a wealth of other information about the knowledge of birds that pertained at the time. He set about investigating how our knowledge of birds has changed over the last five hundred years or so.

Because many ornithologists feel uncomfortable about the idea of caged birds, there is little research conducted upon them. However this is to ignore a huge potential source of information, since they offer the possibility of observing birds at close quarters, and from day to day, and this cannot be done with wild birds. In fact, most of what was known about birds in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, came from studying captive birds.

The most popular cage bird in the sixteenth century was the Nightingale on account of its song, and one of the most remarkable books was the "Traite du Rossignol" ("Treatise on the Nightingale") by an unknown author, published in 1707, and which contains a wealth of information not previously known. Nightingales were in fact difficult to keep in captivity, as they are insectivores and birds caught as adults were frequently force-fed with raw meat, and had their wings tied for days or even weeks to prevent them from battering themselves against the sides of their cages. However, in the late 1600s, a German called Pernau built a large aviary for his birds, and was able to let them out to feed themselves. The birds bred successfully, and would go out to forage for food to bring back for their chicks in the aviary. This gave Pernau previously unheard-of opportunities for studying their behaviour.

It was the keeping of captive birds that first suggested that migration took place. Before that, there were some very creative ideas about where birds go in the winter, for example it was believed in some quarters that Swallows hibernated under

water. However, the anonymous author of the Nightingale book noticed that every spring and autumn, his birds became very restless, flying against the wire mesh of their enclosures. Later, others noticed that in the spring, they tried to fly northwards, and in the autumn they tried to fly south. Bird keepers also deduced that some species migrate by day, and others by night. However they had trouble convincing the "hibernatists". The well known Gilbert White had done much to perpetuate these myths, whilst one of his correspondents, a lawyer named Daines Barrington, was quite adamant that birds hibernated. Barrington had an answer to every bit of evidence of migration that was put forward: for example, sailors reported flocks of Swallows crossing the ocean, that landed on the rigging of their ships, but Barrington claimed that their need to rest on the rigging proved that they were incapable of crossing large stretches of water. However, in the late 1700s a Johann Frisch, also from Germany, attached some coloured threads to the legs of some Swallows saying that, if they returned with the colours still showing, this would prove that they hadn't spent several months under water. The birds duly returned with their colours still showing, and this was thus one of first examples of a successful ringing project. Another study was carried out in the 1940s and 50s birds were kept in large circular enclosures and observations were made as to the frequency and direction of these movements. The experiment was refined in the 1960s when a new experimental cage was introduced – the Emlen funnel - in which the cage was fitted with a printers' ink pad on the base, so the birds left an inky trace on the side of the cage. Experiments with Blackcaps in Germany and the UK showed that the birds were flying in slightly different directions, corresponding to the slightly different flight paths they would need to take to reach their destination.

Tim's inspiration for his second area of interest was the Aquatic Warbler, and its bizarre breeding system. Most species are more or less monogamous for the duration of each breeding attempt (although it seems that about 10% of the members of many species, including human, do not have the biological father they think they have). However tests of Aquatic Warbler nestlings showed that in about half the nests, every chick has a different father; in other words, the females are highly promiscuous. Dissecting male Aquatic Warblers shows that they have extremely large testicles and sperm stores. Mating, far from the 1-2 seconds enjoyed by other passerines, actually goes on for about thirty-five minutes: the male sits on the female's back as they run about feeding etc., looking somewhat like mice, with copulation occurring every few minutes. So this is how the

males have evolved to cope with female promiscuity: once he has secured a female, he does all he can to ensure the offspring carry his genes.

Tim's third interest and area of expertise, is the development of scientific ornithology. He asked professional ornithologists whom they considered to be the greatest ornithologist ever. The answers included Erwin Stresemann (1889-1972) who, in the 1920s, dragged ornithology as a scientific subject into the twentieth century, Ernst Mayr (1904-2005) and David Lack (1910-1973). However, for Tim, the most outstanding ornithologist of all time was John Ray (1627-1705).

Prior to Ray's time, the early encyclopedias, printed in the mid sixteenth century, were obsessed with emblematics: for each species, there was the title, an illustration, and a description leading to a moral message to be drawn from the species. They were designed to help the reader become a better person, and were considered suitable material for "young ladies" to copy onto cushion covers and the like.

In 1662, John Ray and Francis Willughby decided to produce their own encyclopaedia. Ray had been ordained as a priest, but in 1662 had refused to sign the Act of Uniformity, and left the church. He was taken in by Francis Willughby, with whom, in 1661-2, he had toured various islands in Britain such as the Bass Rock, Bardsey, etc. In 1663-6 they embarked upon an extended journey to Europe as far south as Rome. During these travels, they frequented the markets where dead birds were sold as meat, and collected many specimens for dissection, not only to study their physiology, but also to see what they had been eating. On these travels, they also amassed a vast collection of paintings, some of which Tim has seen at the Willughby ancestral home, Middleton Hall in North Yorkshire. Most unfortunately Willughby died at the age of 37, but his widow kept Ray on as tutor to her children, and also to complete the book, which Ray named 'The Ornithology of Francis Willughby'.

The first edition of "The Ornithology of Francis Willughby" was in Latin, published in 1676, and was not very successful; an English edition was published in 1678. They produced engravings of the illustrations from the paintings they had collected, some of these being more successful than others. Ray became a member of the Royal Society, and presented Samuel Pepys, who was President of the Royal Society at the time, with a hand-coloured edition of the book. This priceless object was later re-discovered and is now in McGill University in Canada. In 1691, towards the end of his life, Ray published "The Wisdom of God" – the culmination of a life time of thinking about birds and other aspects of natural history. Tim's own book "The Wisdom of Birds" is a celebration of Ray's genius.

At the time the "Wisdom of God" was published, people lived in fear of God, but Ray wished to put forward the idea of a benign God, who had produced the world for the benefit of mankind. He believed that the perfection of the world at large was evidence of design, but this did not stop him from questioning, in a scientific way, how things were as they were. For example: why do Crossbills lay their eggs earlier than Bullfinches? Answer: because the food on which Crossbills rear their young appears earlier than the Bullfinch's. Some questions, such as why all creatures have such a powerful appetite for copulation, he admitted he didn't know, and would leave for others to find out.

Ray was thus getting close to realising the existence of natural selection nearly two hundred years before Darwin's theories were published in 1859. Crucial to the theory of evolution is the issue of sexual selection: how male and females of any species select their mates, i.e. how sexual behaviour differs for the two sexes. This was an area in which Darwin was inhibited by the times he lived in. His daughter Henrietta, who acted as proof-reader for him, also acted as censor. Original hand-written documents in the Cambridge University Library show where Henrietta had deleted what she thought was improper material. It was another hundred years, in the early 1970s, before George Williams understood what Darwin was trying to get at: the answer lying in the issue of the necessary participation of each sex in the successful rearing of the next generation.

In answering questions from the floor, Tim touched on the study of Bullfinch songs, and how they are to some extent learned – they are not purely a matter of instinct. These studies have shown how neurones can change throughout life, and may offer a start to solving the problems of, for example, Parkinson's Disease.

And the mystery birds? They are Bearded Tit, Avocet, Nightjar and Spotted Flycatcher.

Tim was thanked for sharing with us the exceptional breadth and scope of his knowledge. We had had a memorable evening in which we had learned a lot – and been much entertained by his wit and good humour. More information on Tim's book can be found at: <http://wisdomofbirds.co.uk/>.

Wendy Thomson

The Lecture

Texas Revisited

The March speaker was Bob Croxton, a long-standing (and much respected) member of SBSG. In this talk he described a 2,000-mile solo trip, starting and finishing at Houston, and using a hired car, motels and guide books. The route took Bob through dramatic and diverse scenery, with mountains, deserts and wetlands, and this gave him an extremely diverse range of birds, most of which he seemed to have photographed.

From Houston, Bob travelled north-west to San Antonio, passing through stunning wildflower meadows, stretching off into the distance, a blaze of colour. He continued north-west (via another Sheffield!) to the Rio Grande valley which he followed down to the coast at Brownsville, via the Big Ben National Park. This provided him with more wonderful photographs of the rocky desert landscape and, further down the valley, the reservoirs and the huge variety of birds there. The mouth of the river is now considerably less Grande than it was in former times, due to extraction of its waters for irrigation purposes.

The third leg of the journey was up the coast back to Houston. This included the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, with its "Rail Trail" that included added alligators, and the High Island sanctuaries for migration watching - and for large numbers of people arguing about identification. The last day took Bob up the Louisiana coast, with its hundreds of square miles of marshland, and the Peveto Woods Migrating Birds sanctuary.

Bob was thanked for his memorable talk, with amazing photography. Although Bob insisted that with today's equipment "anyone can do it", this is clearly not the case. To get photographs of wild birds, centre-frame, and in illustrative poses is no mean feat, and I'm sure we all came away with our "favourite" Texan bird. Bob said Black Skimmers are popular, but I would go for Scott's Oriole, Western Scrub Jay, or Indigo Bunting. Well that was until he showed us his pictures of Northern Harrier in flight...

Wendy Thomson

Local Field Trip Report

Upper Derwent Valley, Saturday 21st March

A collection of SBSG members assembled on Windy Corner on a hazy March morning to witness the now expected early spring passage of Helium-filled balloons across the Pennines. Only one was seen this year, picked up moving east above Slippery Stones by the ever-alert Roy Twigg and confidently identified as Pale Blue *Inflatus cyaneus*. Pale Blue is a common species on the west coast, especially in the Blackpool area, but is a vagrant to Sheffield, often after sustained westerly winds.

An added bonus of balloon watching at this time of year is the chance to observe various species of raptor when they are at their most obvious, often displaying above the plantations of the Upper Derwent Valley. Our main target species didn't make us wait too long before putting in an appearance: an immature male Goshawk rising up

from the trees and its usually secretive existence terrorising the birds and mammals of the Valley to perform admirably for the waiting crowd. This bird showed well for perhaps half an hour, drifting up and down the east side of Howden Res and giving excellent views, though it didn't indulge in the spectacular full display flight - most likely an unpaired bird searching for a territory and mate.

After this, however, things quietened down with just sporadic sightings of Common Buzzards, Kestrels and a single Raven to show for our efforts. Later on a couple of Peregrines appeared out of the still hazy skies to reward those who stuck it out until lunchtime.

Richard Dale

South Peak Raptor Study Group Annual Report 2008

The South Peak Raptor Study Group (SPRSG) was formed in 1998 to monitor breeding success of raptors in the South Peak. In general, the study area extends into the Upper Derwent Valley in the north, and also parts of NE Derbyshire that are not in the Peak District, but does not include those parts of South Derbyshire that are outside the Peak District. There is some variation in this, as indicated below. The following is a summary of their Annual Report for 2008.

Mick Taylor introduced the Annual Report by describing 2008 as a good one for Barn Owls, Merlins and Hobbies, but an extremely bad one for Hen Harrier, and for Goshawks and Peregrines in the northern moors. It is believed that the causes of the failures are known, but they are difficult to prove, although it is hoped that improved surveillance in 2009 may help to resolve what he describes as "this abysmal situation".

The group continues to build on its database of information, which is available to interested parties. The group has also continued its involvement with the Northern England Raptor Forum and, together with the Peak District Raptor Monitoring Group, is hosting the 2009 North of England Raptor and Upland Birds

Conference in Bakewell. The Forum's Peregrine paper is nearing completion, and will be published in 2009.

The table below summarises the data for breeding success over the past five years. In general, the number of fledged young can be assumed to be the minimum.

	Number of Sites					Number Successful					Number Fledged				
	*e04	*e05	*e06	*e07	'08	*e04	*e05	*e06	*e07	'08	*e04	*e05	*e06	*e07	'08
Hen Harrier	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	10	-	-
Goshawk	15	16	18	23	24	8+	11	12	14	11+	16+	18+	25+	26+	27+
Buzzard	c43	44+	69+	75+	80+	17+	17+	25+	30+	40+	42+	30+	35+	40+	50+
Merlin	11	9	9	7	9	5	5	4	3	7+	17	21	13	8	24+
Hobby*	23	35	40	44	35	17	31	32+	28	25	41+	72	73+	55	61
Peregrine**	18	17	23	28	32	10	11	14	11+	19+	26	30	32	23+	41+
Barn Owl	3+	8	10+	10+	18	3	5+	10	10	12	11	24	28+	37	27
LE Owl	3	2	3	3	8	2	1	2	2	1+	6	1	5	5	2+
SE Owl	8	11+	1	1	9	2+	7+	1	1	2+	7+	?	2+	4	5+
Raven	27	31+	31+	33	42+	19	15+	19+	20	16+	40+	47+	46+	64+	48+

* includes South Derbyshire.

** includes North Staffordshire sites.

It will be recalled that in 2006, two pairs of **Hen Harrier** bred successfully for the first time in the SPRSG recording area but the event was marred by the unexplained disappearance of both adult males. In 2007, birds were present in suitable breeding areas early in the season but, for some reason, did not stay to breed. In 2008, a pair was present on the National Trust moorlands in Upper Derwentdale in spring, and skydancing, copulation and nest building took place. However, although the female was seen to roost at the nest site at dusk on 3rd May as usual, she failed to appear at dawn on the 4th, and was never seen again. A second female appeared, with exactly the same course of events: sky-dancing, copulation, nest-building and food passing, until late evening of 19th May, with no sign of the female on 20th or thereafter. Hen Harriers are diurnal raptors, and do not migrate at night, nor are they likely to disappear at that stage of the breeding cycle. There were no signs of the birds being killed by a fox, or other mammalian predator, and the only other feasible conclusion is that the birds were disposed of by human intervention. It is known that 61% of adult harriers disappear from grouse moors during the breeding season. The male stayed in the area until at least 21 June. During the autumn passage period, up to four birds were seen on the Eastern Moors, namely an adult male, a sub-adult male, an adult female, and an unsexed "ringtail". There are a number of wing-tagging projects for this species, and any sightings should be sent to Barry O'Donoghue (barryodonoghue@yahoo.ie or tel 087 9110715) giving details of location, date and patterns/colours on each wing.

As in 2007, there was a noticeable split in breeding success for **Goshawks**, with very low success rates to the north of Bamford, but much higher success to the south. Thus north of Bamford, six sites were occupied, although only a single bird was present at one site, and three pairs bred: one was successful fledging three young; one failed at the egg stage; one failed at the small young stage (a mountain bike obstacle course constructed adjacent to the

nest tree may have had something to do with it ...). South of Bamford, 15 pairs were located, ten of which were successful, fledging 24 young. Three other known sites were not fully checked this year.

Sparrowhawks are not under close scrutiny by the group but sightings are regular, and the species continues to thrive in urban areas.

Buzzards have increased spectacularly over the last 20 years or so, and can now be seen in most wooded areas, and have even colonised some urban outskirts. With increasing numbers and expanding territories, it is difficult to give accurate numbers, and the table shows the group's best estimates.

Voles appeared to be plentiful in 2008, and **Kestrels** took full advantage, with several pairs fledging four or five young. At one site in late summer and early autumn, up to eight birds could be seen hunting. One brood of three chicks was ringed.

Despite some very wet weather during June and July, 2008 was the best year for **Merlins** since 2002 (when they also fledged 24 young). One site was known to fail after disturbance by thoughtless birdwatchers and photographers, and the outcome from another site was unknown. Eighteen of the young were ringed, but one individual, ringed on 11 July at 16 days old, was subsequently killed when flying into a window in Spilsby, Lincs, on 17th August.

Hobbies also did well, despite the bad weather in June and July. Most nests were in lowland areas, the exceptions being three in the Peak District. As shown in the table, only 25 of the 35 nests were known to have been successful: of the remaining ten sites, four were known to have failed, and the fate of the other six was unknown, although failure is most likely. A total of 34

chicks were colour-ringed, and a bird that was colour-ringed in 2007 was photographed in Cambridgeshire in early summer 2008, but precise details are not yet to hand. Any sightings of colour-ringed birds would be welcomed by Anthony Messenger (01332 665257).

Peregrines overall enjoyed a fairly successful breeding season in 2008, despite adverse weather earlier in the season which probably contributed to failure of first clutches and of mortality of chicks shortly after hatching. The site on the Roaches in Staffordshire which failed in 2007, probably due to poor weather, was successful in 2008, fledging two young; this was the first successful breeding by this species on the Roaches for 100 years. In addition the Derby Cathedral pair fledged four young, and a pair in lowland Derbyshire again raised one young. Single birds continue to infill potentially suitable sites each year, and breeding attempts seem to follow in subsequent years: this year, an adult male summered at a second quarry site in lowland Derbyshire, whilst an immature bird was present throughout the season on a natural crag in a limestone dale in the White Peak. A pair was present at a new site in a White Peak quarry, where there had only been an immature bird in 2007. However, in contrast to all this, five sites in Upper Derwendale that had previously been successful all failed: birds bred at the Alport Castles site, but deserted early in the season; at a second site, a pair was present during the early part of the season but then were not seen subsequently; at a third site, a single bird was seen occasionally; at the other two sites no activity was seen. Evidence from the White Peak quarries suggests that pairs are very site faithful, and will willingly move to another ledge if one becomes unsuitable. There is no explanation for the disappearance of pairs in Derwendale, other than suspected human interference.

There was continuing good news for the **Barn Owl** in 2008, mainly thanks to one member of the group in conjunction with sympathetic landowners and farmers who allowed nest boxes to be erected on their property. All the 27 young were ringed. It is hoped to erect more nest boxes in future years, so it is hoped that the species will continue to increase.

Little Owls are not intensively studied by the group but continue to thrive, mainly in the White Peak where they frequent old farm buildings, drystone walls and dead trees. A slight increase in sightings from moorland edges was a welcome development.

The **Tawny Owl** is by far the commonest owl in the area and, again, is not intensively studied. It is often heard calling in large suburban gardens, as well as in most woods and parks. Two broods, of two and one chick, were ringed.

Although eight pairs of **Long-Eared Owl** were located early in the year, only one was known to have been

successful. One other pair may have reared two chicks, but the outcome here was uncertain. One breeding/roosting site that has been occupied for 47 years continues to suffer disturbance, and it is likely that the birds will move away. This is regrettable, since birds can easily be seen, without disturbance, if more care is taken.

There was a slight improvement in breeding success of **Short-eared Owls** after the very poor figures from 2007. However, the most notable event in 2008 was the influx during October and November in the Eastern Moors, involving at least ten birds, with up to seven seen hunting at one site in the late afternoon.

A slight increase in numbers of pairs of **Ravens** was probably due to increased observer activity rather than an actual increase. Of the 42 nests located, 22 were in quarries, 14 in trees, 5 on natural cliffs, and one on a metal gantry. Of the quarry nesters, 8 were successful, fledging 23 young; one pair definitely failed, and the outcome at the others is unknown. Of the 14 tree nesters, at least 5 were successful, fledging 17 young; two pairs definitely failed. Of the others, two pairs on natural cliffs fledged 8 young, whilst the gantry pair were also successful, but the number of fledged young is unknown. Unfortunately, it was not always possible to make second and third visits to nests, and this resulted in the "outcomes unknown" figures. However, the success rate of known nests was high, and the group believes that the total of fledged young could have been over one hundred.

Two other non-breeding species are also mentioned in the SPRSG report. There were again several sightings of **Red Kites** in the study area, and it is hoped that this species may breed in our area before too long. There was just one record of **Marsh Harrier** in the spring, but autumn passage during late August and early September was slightly up on last year with at least six individuals moving through.

The Report also lists the recoveries of raptors ringed by the Sorby Breck Ringing Group. Birds recovered in 2008 included: a Merlin recovered 37 days after ringing when it flew into a window in Spilsby, Lincs; a Peregrine recovered 1795 days after ringing, found dead below a nest in Darwen, Lancs; a Barn Owl recovered 161 days after ringing, sick or injured when it entered a warehouse in Mansfield, and its ultimate fate is unknown.

Some Acknowledgments: The membership of the group in 2008 was: Mick Taylor (Coordinator), John Atkin, Matthew Capper, Roy Frost, Trevor Grimshaw, Mick Lacey, Geoff Mawson, Anthony Messenger, Stephen Moores, Steve Samworth, Jack Street and Paul Tooley. In their Annual Report, Mick Taylor expresses his thanks to all the members of the group for their diligent fieldwork and expertise. He also listed and expressed his thanks to, the landowners who allowed access to their property.

Rotherham Wildlife Sites

There is a change in how important wildlife sites are categorised and identified in Britain. This will mean continuous bird recording and survey work in Rotherham will take on a vital role in protecting the countryside. For a site to qualify it will have to meet set criteria.

The presence of breeding birds determined by field evidence including: sightings of the species in the same site throughout the breeding bird season, territorial (singing) male, pairs of birds, nest building activity, nests with eggs or chicks, birds carrying nesting material or faecal sacs.

For the purposes of these guidelines, 'regularly' will be judged by the species being recorded in at least 3 of the most recent 5 years prior to consideration as a Wildlife Site.

Sites that satisfy one or more of the following guidelines will be eligible for designation as a Local Wildlife Site.

- 1) Any site which regularly supports more than 0.25% of the total British breeding population.
- 2) Any site which which regularly supports more than 0.25% of the total British non-breeding population.
- 3) Any site which regularly supports a breeding population of a species on the UK 'Red List' or species of principal importance for conserving biodiversity in England or is listed Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- 4) Any site which regularly supports a good assemblage of breeding bird species characteristic of the habitat in which they are recorded.
- 5) Any waterbody or grouping of waterbodies that regularly supports a significant range and number of over-wintering wildfowl, passage migrants and/or wading birds.

Based on data up to and including 2006 the following sites meet one or more of these criteria:

Aldwarke SF (category 3) for its breeding Song Thrush and Reed Bunting.

Bassingthorpe Spring & Hudson's Rough (category 3) for its breeding Song Thrush.

Brampton Common (category 3) for its breeding Skylark.

Catcliffe Flash (category 3, 4 & 5) for its breeding Gadwall, Teal, Shoveler and Reed Bunting, wintering wildfowl and its assemblage of breeding birds of lowland damp grassland.

Creighton & Piccadilly Wood (category 3) for its breeding Song Thrush.

Collier Brook & Marsh (category 3) for its breeding Reed Bunting and Yellowhammer.

Grange Park (category 3) for its breeding Song Thrush and Yellowhammer.

Hooton Brook & Valley (inc Firsby) (category 3) for its breeding Gadwall and Willow Tit.

Keppel's Field & Scholes Coppice (category 3) for its breeding Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Song Thrush, Skylark and Reed Bunting

Kilnhurst Agricultural Lettings & Hall Wood (category 3) for its breeding Skylark.

Kilnhurst Ings (category 3) for its breeding Reed Bunting.

Listerdale Wood (category 3) for its breeding Linnet and Song Thrush.

Loscar Common (category 3) for its breeding Corn Bunting.

Rother Valley CP (category 3 & 5) for its breeding Reed Bunting, Skylark and Yellowhammer and for its winter wildfowl.

Silverwood Pit Top (category 3) for its breeding Little Ringed Plover and Ringed Plover

Thrybergh CP (category 3 & 4) for its breeding Gadwall, Grasshopper Warbler, Willow Tit, Tree Sparrow, Linnet and Reed Bunting as well as breeding bird populations of damp grassland & breeding bird populations of water margins

Thrybergh Tip (category 3 & 4) Willow Tit & Reed Bunting Gadwall, Teal, Shoveler, Ringed Plover, Redshank, Willow Tit & Reed Bunting as well as breeding birds of damp grassland & water margins

Todwick Common (category 2 & 3) for wintering Golden Plover and breeding Skylark and Yellowhammer.

Treeton Dyke (category 4) for its breeding Grasshopper Warbler.

Ulley Country Park (category 3) for its breeding Willow Tit, Song Thrush, Tree Sparrow, Bullfinch & Yellowhammer.

Warren Vale (category 3) for its breeding Song Thrush, House Sparrow, Starling, Willow Tit and Linnet.

Wentworth Park Lakes (category 3) for its breeding Reed Bunting and Song Thrush.

It is the aim of the RDOS to increase the number of sites which qualify in terms of the birds present. It's not just about finding rare birds, species such as Dunnock and Yellowhammer help a site qualify for this status.

So what's involved, well we have put together a list of sites which we would like to survey to search for the presence of breeding birds. We have avoided sites where we already receive regular records.

Site 1. Harthill Reservoir (SK4880)	Site 64. Gibbing Greave Wood (SK4592)	Site 89. Hooper Plantation (SK4948)
Site 5. Norwood & Locks (SK4781)	Site 65. Herringthorpe Wood/Great Bank (SK4592)	Site 90. Rainborough Park (SK4099)
Pithouse West (SK4584)	Site 67: Bassingthorpe Spring (SK4194)	Site 91. Simon Wood (SK3899)
Site 7. Nickerwood (SK4784)	Site 68: Grange Park (SK3893)	Site 92. Lee Wood (SK3998)
Site 27. Brampton Common (SK4986-4987)	Site 70: Lady Clough & Smithy Wood (SK3694)	Site 93. King's Wood (SK3899)
Site 39. Wickersley Gorse (SK4791)	Site 72: Barley Hole Springs (SK3797)	Site 96. Rockingham Wood & Shepherd's Plantation (SK4095)
Site 40. Pinch Mill (SK4790)	Site 73: Wentworth Park (SK4096-4196)	Site 106. Kiveton Park Colliery (SK4842)
Site 42. Wickersley Wood (SK4891)	Site 81: Ravenfield Park (SK4895)	
Site 43. King's Pond & Plantation (SK4990)	Site 82. Hooton Cliff Plantation (SK4997)	

Only a single visit during the breeding season is required although the more visits the better. Maps can be produced on request to aid accurate recording to help define the site boundaries.

If anyone is interested please let me know by email – duncbye@hotmail.com so I can co-ordinate coverage in the area and avoid duplication of effort. The list is not exhaustive so if you think we've missed a site, let us know and go and survey it.

A tale of two goldfish...

On the first frosty morning in November I peered from the dining room window and spotted an owl pellet on the top of my bird table. This I collected and I found it to be grey in colour with some protruding bones.

With the aid of 2 publications from The Mammal Society 'The Analysis of Owl Pellets' by D.W Yalden and 'A Guide to British Owls and Owl Pellets' by Leanne Thomas I ascertained that it was produced by a Tawny Owl. I allowed it to air-dry and then carefully teased it apart to try and identify its prey.

The first obvious fraction was grass which with accompanying grit and sand indicated worms as a prey item. Many small bone fragments were identified as the humerus and scapulars (shoulder blades) of birds with a possible sternum of birds. The teeth, jaw and pelvis of a mouse were identified along with several frog tibio- fibula the latter being readily recognised by their double barrelled structure.

A large portion consisted of thin translucent scales/bones and some distinctive spool-like vertebrae, concave at each end. Some small translucent bones tapering gradually to a point made me realise this were from fish, seldom found apparently in Tawny Owl pellets. After then finding 3 small serrated jaw bones it suddenly dawned on me that the bird table over-looked my small garden pond. I was aware that I had lost several goldfish but I had never considered Tawny Owls.

I have very little knowledge of owl pellets dissection and would be grateful for any advice, from members, on my tentative conclusions.

Bob Bartlett

Fish are a documented part of the diet of tawny owls, so this story, while undoubtedly unusual, is not unheard of. Perhaps herons get more blame than they deserve! If any other members have experience of fishing tawny owls then please contact the Bulletin at the usual address. PM.

Birds of SK37 and SK47

Dronfield and District Natural History Society have released their long-awaited publication "Birds of SK37 and SK47". The work covers 25 years of bird recording by its members, in the two OS squares covered.

The book contains accounts and distribution of all species and phenology of migratory birds seen in the study area, plus accounts of house martin surveys, and the Society's ongoing garden birds survey.

The publication has a limited release of 250 copies, and costs £5, plus £1 postage. To obtain a copy contact the Society's Secretary on 0114 2890155.

Wildlife events at Clifton Park

In the coming months Clifton Park, Rotherham is hosting an exhibition and a series of nature walks with different themes.

Display in the Octagonal Room (F08) at Clifton Park Museum. 29th May- 4th October 2009
There will be several display cases which will contain as wide a range of examples of museum specimens as possible to show the diversity of our collections. If possible, all the specimens displayed will be of species that can be found in the park. It will include stuffed mammals and birds, pressed plants, insects, snails and other small animals. Promotional material for all the local societies will be displayed as well as biodiversity and species information.

Wildlife walks in Clifton Park

These will take place between 2:00pm and about 4:00pm, on the last Tuesday of each month, starting with April and (currently) ending with November. The dates and themes will be as follows:

April 28th - Birds
May 26th - Plants
June 23rd - Insects
July 28th - Pond life
August 25th - Trees
September 29th - Fungi
October 27th - Plant galls and Birds
November 24th - Photography in the park

Each of the walks has the stated 'theme' above. This is a slight overstatement of the way it will work; there will be at least one person with knowledge of the stated subject, but the walk is for everyone. This

means that people can come for the walk and company and we will be glad to see them, and that there will be knowledgeable support and friendly advice for all, from those with a casual interest in nature to serious naturalists.

To this end, local natural history societies are invited to take part, as well as known individual naturalists. One reason for asking such societies to be involved is so that people can find out more about them and, we hope, discover that they can offer a good way to pursue an interest in nature in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

The stated aim of each walk will be to try and see as many different things as possible as we walk. There will be printed maps of the park freely available for anyone who would like to record what is seen on the map, though such involvement is by choice. As the group walk, what is seen will be discussed, so it should be a friendly occasion.

After the walk, it is planned for the group to gather in the new park building for a short discussion or perhaps slide / film show. People will be encouraged to photograph what they see, and perhaps give permission for us to display them in the park building.

It is hoped that the result of these activities will give a reasonable impression of wildlife in the park through the year. It should also give a basis for a cumulative list of all the 'things' that can be found in the park.

Committee News – a double whammy!

On Feb 25th the Committee lost Helen Hipperson to the lure of a job in London, though she'll still spend time in Sheffield and contribute to the Atlas Project as much as she can. Then came shock number two as Jenny Kingsland also told us she wished to leave the Committee. Both have worked hard in their respective roles and we all owe them a big vote of thanks.

So we need two new Committee Members; if you can give a few hours a month to the SBSG and want to get more involved, please get in touch with David Wood or any other Committee Member to find out what it entails.

Volunteers needed to write up lectures!

Our regular scribe Wendy Thomson, who has performed a sterling task over many years writing up entertaining and readable accounts of the group's indoor lectures, will be unable to do so for many of the upcoming meetings. If anyone fancies stepping in then please get in touch at peterjmella@googlemail.com

Swarovski lens cap found

Found on the roadside near Canyard Hills: lens cap from a Swarovski 'scope, approx 100mm diameter.
Contact Roger Butterfield 077 1957 530, mail@rogerbutterfield.co.uk

RECENT SIGHTINGS

Recent Sightings

Mid-February – 31st March 2009

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

Whooper Swan	Three at Silverwood Lagoon on 5th March, 25 over Ulley CP and 13 at Thrybergh CP on 18th and seven at Ladybower Res on 20th March
Pink-footed Goose	Passage in mid-Feb included max of 1700 NW over Fulwood and 1420 NW at Thrybergh CP on 14th and 800 also at Thrybergh CP on 19th
Shelduck	Singles at Orgreave Lagoons on 21st Feb, Aldwarke SF on 22nd Feb and Broomhead Res on 8th March, four at Pebley Pond on 18th March and two at Aldwarke SF on 22nd March and Thrybergh Tip on 29th
Wigeon	Max counts of 62 at Orgreave Lagoons on 14th Feb, 36 at Blue Man's Bower on 21st Feb and 115 at RVCP on 15th March
Pintail	A female at Aldwarke SF on 15th Feb
Garganey	A pair at RVCP on 19th-22nd March
Red-crested Pochard	A pair at Graves Park on 22nd March
Pochard	A max of 66 at Thrybergh CP on 13th and 15th Feb
Tufted Duck	A max of 360 at Thrybergh CP on 12th Feb
Goldeneye	A max of 31 at RVCP on 22nd March
Red-breasted Merganser	Two males at Froggatt on 26th Feb and singles at Chatsworth on 28th Feb, Ladybower Res on 12th March, Dale Dike Res on 12th and Froggatt on 22nd March
Black Grouse	Up to three regular at Moscar Cross throughout
Great-crested Grebe	Max of 23 at Thrybergh CP on 12th Feb
Bittern	One at Blackburn Meadows on 17th Feb
Red Kite	One flew S at Bamford Edge on 24th March, one was at Stanage Edge on 28th and one flew SE at Carr Vale NR on 29th
Osprey	One flew N at Thrybergh CP on 28th March and one moved N through RVCP on 29th
Water Rail	Singles at 70 Acre Hill, Blackburn Meadows, Thrybergh Tip and Collier Brook Marsh
Oystercatcher	Reports of two or more included four at Orgreave Lagoons on 1st March and two at both Langsett Res and Strines Res on 8th and 16th March
Little Ringed Plover	First returning bird at RVCP on 12th March followed by one at Thrybergh CP on 20th
Ringed Plover	One at Centenary Way Riverside on 7th March with two there on 14th. Two also at Parkgate on 8th March and Aldwarke on 10th.
Golden Plover	Max count on the lowlands of 110 at Ulley CP on 13th Feb while on the uplands the Peat Pits flock increased from 256 on 23rd Feb to 717 on 26th March
Lapwing	100 at Ulley CP on 13th Feb, 81 at Redmires Res and 67 at Thrybergh CP on 28th Feb, 70 at Peat Pits on 2nd March and 100 at Langsett on 24th March
Dunlin	Two at Langsett Moor on 10th March and one at Thrybergh CP on 22nd March
Jack Snipe	One at Blackburn Meadows on 17th Feb, seven at RVCP on 22nd Feb and one there on 26th
Snipe	A max of 37 at RVCP on 22nd Feb, with eight at Blackburn Meadows NR on 24th Feb and Aldwarke SF on 8th March
Woodcock	Two roding regularly at Morehall Res from 1st March, also two at Ecclesall Woods on 12th March and Brightholmlee on 16th
Black-tailed Godwit	One at RVCP on 24th March
Curlew	Max of 38 at Redmires Res on 12th March, 54 in the roost at Middleton Moor on 19th and 30 at Midhope Moor on 24th and Upper Hay on 29th

Redshank	Six at RVCP on 4th March and eight there on 22nd with two at Thrybergh CP the same day
Green Sandpiper	One at Centenary Way Riverside on 7th and 22nd March, with two present on 14th
Black-headed Gull	530 in the roost at Broomhead Res on 15th Feb, 350 at Langsett Res on 19th Feb and 310 at Thrybergh CP on 15th March
Common Gull	A max of 43 in the Broomhead Res roost on 21st Feb and 35 at Langsett Res on 5th March
Lesser Black-backed Gull	A max of five at Middleton Moor on 19th March
Herring Gull	33 flew NW at Breck Farm on 15th Feb, 14 flew N at Ulley CP on 21st Feb and 19 went W at Thrybergh Tip on 1st March
Great Black-backed Gull	Three W at Ulley CP on 14th Feb, five at Thrybergh CP on 19th and one there on 21st, two W at Redmires Res on 15th March and one at Morehall Res on 28th
Kittiwake	One departed to the N at Thrybergh CP on 10th March
Barn Owl	One at Blackburn Meadows NR on 17th Feb
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	Regular reports of one or two from Beeley Wood and Gleadless Valley LNR. Also singles at Ecclesall Woods on 23rd Feb, Oughtibridge and Graves Park on 11th March and Froggatt on 21st March with two in the Rivelin Valley on 24th
Skylark	Max of 24 at Breck Farm on 22nd Feb and 60 at Inkersall on 1st March
Sand Martin	The first flew N at Thrybergh CP on 16th March with one at Treeton Dyke on 18th. Max of 12 at Thrybergh CP and 20 at RVCP on 27th March
Swallow	One W at Ecclesall on 13th March and one at Thrybergh CP on 24th March with two at the latter site on 27th and one on 28th and 29th, when one was also at Treeton
House Martin	One at RVCP on 22nd and 27th March
Pied Wagtail	100+ were at Baslow SF on 28th Feb and 17 went to roost at Middleton Moor on 19th March. White Wagtails were seen at Harthill Res on 13th March, RVCP on 24th March and at Carr Vale NR on 27th
Waxwing	62 records of flocks of varying sizes with max of 380 at Crosspool on 16th Feb and a flock at Handsworth that peaked at 200 on 28th Feb. Most recently a small flock at Malin Bridge from 23rd-27th March at least
Stonechat	Most records of one or two birds with a max of four at Whitwell Moor on 13th March
Wheatear	First recorded on 15th March with a male at Roper Hill with further records of singles from sites to the W over the following week
Ring Ouzel	Two at Whinstone Lee Tor on 24th March and one singing at Abbey Brook on 29th
Fieldfare	A number of large flocks reported chiefly to the W, including 250 at Langsett on 6th March, 550 at White Lee Moor on 20th March and 375 at Rud Hill on 21st March
Redwing	In smaller numbers than Fieldfare with more flocks to the E of the area. Max included 120 at Ringinglow on 20th Feb, 70 at Stubley Hollows on 6th March and 110 at Wigtwizzle on 8th March
Blackcap	Four records from gardens suggesting wintering birds rather than newly arrived migrants: Endcliffe on 16th Feb, Hillsborough on 18th Feb, Walkley Bank on 14th March and Millhouses on 22nd March. One singing at Carr Vale NR on 29th March was perhaps the first arrival
Chiffchaff	The first to return were three at Ulley CP on 15th March, with two at RVCP and singles at Gleadless Valley LNR, Blackburn Meadows NR, Thrybergh CP and Baslow SF the same day. Subsequently a max of six at Ulley CP on 22nd and at Warren Vale LNR on 29th and seven in the Loxley Valley on the latter date
Great Grey Shrike	One at Moscar on 1st March
Brambling	Small numbers, mostly from gardens with a max of eight at Dore on 13th Feb
Siskin	Most records from the E of the area with max of 50 at Damflask Res on 16th Feb and Ulley CP on 1st March
Common (Mealy) Redpoll	Singles at Inkersall and Chapeltown Park on 15th Feb and in a Fulwood garden on 8th March
Lesser Redpoll	A large flock at 70 Acre Hill peaked at 200 on 14th Feb with max counts elsewhere of 120 at Beeley Wood on 18th Feb and 50 at Wharnccliffe Wood on 24th Feb rising to 200 on 29th March
Crossbill	Small numbers in the Upper Derwent Valley throughout. Elsewhere 28 were in Wharnccliffe Wood on 8th March, three were at Lady Canning's Plantation on 28th Feb and 10th March, eight were at Wharnccliffe Chase on 14th and two were at Ewden Height on 15th March

Yellowhammer Max counts included 25 at Ulley CP on 13th Feb, Breck Farm on 15th Feb, and Thrybergh CP the following day with 40 at Inkersall on 1st March

Reed Bunting 25 were counted at Inkersall on 1st March

Corn Bunting Eight at Pebley on 15th Feb

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

MG Archer, S Ashton, J Bailey, S Bailey, W Bailey, SJ Barnes, A Baverstock, MA Beevers, AR Bell, RP Blagden, K Borman, K Bower, SJ Branch, PL Brown, R Butterfield, DM Bye, BM Carr, NR Cross, R Dale, S Davies, A Deighton, K Dutton, M Dyson, M Earle, G Featherstone, J Feltrup, MG Fenner, R Findlay-Robinson, D Fox, D Gains, M Garner, KJ Gaston, M Gillet, KR Gould, R Green, S Guymmer, M Hattersely, A Hill, RD Hill, H Hipperson, J Hobson, M Hodgson, TH Hughes, C Hurst, G James, Alan Johnson, Ann Johnson, J Kingsland, J Kirkman, R Knowles, P Leonard, R Lowndes, J Marriott, P Mella, TH Minskip, R Nicholls, MG Oxlade, D Parkes, PH Pearsall, R Pethen, NR Porter, MN Reeder, P Ridsdale, D Roddis, S Samworth, M Sanders, K Schofield, J Sherwin, M Sherwin, MA Smethurst, D Smyth, B Spencer, J Street, I Taylor, SG Tebbutt, A Thompson, M Timms, R Twigg, G Tyrer, SE Vickers, G Watson, D Wheeler, RDR Williams, D Wood, D Woodriff, BTO BirdTrack, Rotherham and District OS, Sorby-Breck Ringing Group and Thrybergh CP Bird Log.

DATES TO NOTE				
Time/Date	Group	Location	Speaker	Title
7.30pm 7 th May	RSPB Sheffield Local Group	Central United Reform Church, Sheffield	Roger Mitchell	Potteric Carr – Against All Odds

NEW MEMBERS

The Group welcomes the following new members – **Diane Cockayne, Philip Smith** and **Deborah Craddock**- and welcomes **Bob Lowndes** back to the group.

We hope you enjoy your membership, and good birding!

IMPORTANT! Overdue subscriptions – last chance to pay!

If any members have outstanding payments for their subscriptions then these need to be paid to Jenny Kingsland before **15th May**. If she does not receive your payment by this date then this will be your final issue!

See this page of the website for prices and forms <http://www.sbsg.org/joining/whyjoin.asp>

COPY DATE FOR NEXT BULLETIN

The next Bulletin will be issued at the June Meeting. Please note that any items for inclusion in the Bulletin must be received by Pete Mella at peterjmella@googlemail.com (for preference), or 396 Loxley Road, Loxley, Sheffield S6 4TJ, by **Sunday 31st May**.

Last issue's plea for contributions was very successful indeed – if you sent something and it didn't make this bulletin then it will be in the next!

BULLETIN BY EMAIL

More members have now agreed to take their Bulletins by email. This is now about one-third of membership and this will help funds in cutting down the cost of sending out Bulletins. It is appreciated that not all members have the email facility but many thanks to those who have and are willing to receive their copies in this way.