

Sheffield Bird Study Group

BULLETIN



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Bulletin

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RSPB and National Trust to lease Eastern Moors estate

Members of the Group may already be aware, although it has not yet been reported in the bulletin, that the RSPB and National Trust are to be given a 15-year lease by the Peak District National Park Authority to manage the Eastern Moors estate, west of Sheffield.

The 6,200 acre (2,509 hectare) estate is the authority's largest land-holding and includes the popular climbing areas of Curbar, Froggatt and Birchen Edges, as well as Big Moor,

Ramsley Moor, Totlely Moor, Clod Hall Moor and Leash Fen.

The joint business case was accepted by the National Park Authority as the best way of securing the future of the land, which was bought from Severn Trent Water in 1984.

The land will be managed for both wildlife and access and they will undertake climate change adaptation and monitoring work. The site is already well watched by some of

the stalwarts of the group and is noted for many bird species and the visible migration spectacle in the Autumn on the moorland fringe.

Having a such a large scale reserve within the SBSG boundary is great news and the lease should be signed some time this year. Watch this space...

Matthew Capper

Member Profile - David Woodriff

We introduce our new columnist-see his birding diary on the back page.

My enjoyment in bird watching was probably born from long walks as a child in Woolley Woods, Wincobank, with my granddad. I was absorbed by tall stories of tigers living there and it always felt a magical place. Climbing trees and making dens maintained the link whilst still young.

The first real step into taking our hobby a little more seriously was when I went on an organised lunchtime school visit to the same woods sometime in the mid-80's with an experienced former SBSG birder called James Smith. Low and behold – we saw a Rough Legged Buzzard, hardly believable but true.

I became gripped and Concord Park and Woolley Woods became my patch and I was up early before school to see what was around. I enjoyed the finches and the other woodland birds (including Willow Tit) plus the Wheatears on the football fields as they passed through.

A Richard's Pipit (found by the aforementioned birder) was amazing and two of our most secretive woodland birds could both be seen in the woods during the 80's – Hawfinch and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

Funnily enough, I got my best view of Hawfinch when I returned to the woods in the 90's after not visiting for a few years (I'd moved to Nottingham through work). Initially, I was pleased to see a Green Woodpecker - which I'd never recorded here during my intense coverage period. Then, a Hawfinch flew up from the path ahead and perched for enough seconds to allow me to focus my bins on it – amazing!

The intensity of my hobby waned somewhat as a late teenager / early 20's as my career took hold and also my love of football took up most of the weekends. It was never too far away though and I can remember losing focus during a football match as a skein of geese flew over one windy Sunday morning. I pointed these out to some players around me who just

looked at me in total bewilderment!

I returned to north Sheffield in the late 90's and was reinvigorated by the woodland around High Green stretching for miles and miles. I rejoined the SBSG and began to cover my new patch around Wharcliffe Woods and Chase. I am fortunate enough to also have a job that allows me to travel in the region so I can also keep an eye on other areas such as Ulley Reservoir and around the Langsett/Midhope area.

Even when I haven't got my bins on me, I can honestly say that I'm "always looking up". Whilst working around the house, in the car or at work I'm forever gazing to the skies just in case something is going over. Over my house I've picked up skeins of Pink-footed Geese, Snipe, Curlew, Common Buzzard and Sparrowhawk.

If you would like to introduce yourself to the group in a Member Profile please email peterjmella@googlemail.com. Profiles should be around 500 words.

Experienced birders wanted as Peak District guides

SBSG member Kevin Overton has set up a new Peak District Bird Watching Holidays company, as is looking for experienced birders to lead guided walks.

Kevin will be offering birdwatching holidays in the Peaks, that will take birding holidaymakers around such

locations as the Upper Derwent Valley, Padley Gorge, Longshaw and Carsington Water.

Kevin says: "I'm looking for enthusiastic, expert birders who enjoy leading bird walks and sharing their knowledge and passion with others to help me out in the field.

Whether you just want to get involved in the odd day or to do something more frequent, please contact me to let me know".

Those interested should contact kevin@peakdistrictbirdingholidays.co.uk, or visit www.peakdistrictbirdingholidays.co.uk.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Indoor Meetings

Graham Appleton—Flyway to Iceland

Wed 12th May 2010, Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5

The May lecture will see a talk from Graham Appleton, the British Trust for Ornithology's Head of Communications. As well as working to promote the work of the BTO, Graham has written papers on reports in recent years on nightingale habitat selection, black-tailed godwit migration strategy, starling and house sparrow populations, and Icelandic bird distributions. It is the latter subject that he will be speaking to us about.

Members' Night

Wed 9th June 2010, Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5

Is it really that time of year already? This is the talk you've all been waiting for, when the group hands the indoor meeting over to you! It's the perfect opportunity to wow your fellow SBSG members with your knowledge and experience, introduce us to some of your favourite birding locations, or simply make us seethe with jealousy at some particularly gripping birds you've seen on your travels... If you'd like to give a short presentation on the night, then please get in contact with any member of the committee.

Field Meetings

Spring Migrants at Rother Valley

Sun 25th April 2010, Rother Valley Country Park

Kevin Gould will be leading this trip to RVCP, to seek out spring migrants. Meet at 8am at Meadowgate Lake Car Park,

Dawn Chorus in May

Details to be confirmed - please see the SBSG website for details and announcements.

**For details of minibus field trips please contact Paul Medforth on
01246 418120 or 07968 092032**

OTHER DATES TO NOTE

15th April 2010. RSPB Local Group Indoor Meeting. The talk will be "A Celebration of Birds" by Peter Holden. Central United Reform Church, Sheffield, 7.30pm.

6th May 2010. RSPB Local Group Indoor Meeting. The talk will be "Pharaoh's Birds" by John Wyatt. Central United Reform Church, Sheffield, 7.30pm.

15th May 2010. Sheffield Wildlife Trust Dawn Chorus at Blacka Moor. Meets 5am at Stony Ridge Car Park, email h.wittram@wildsheffield.com to book a place.

16th May 2010. RSPB Old Moor Breakfast With The Birds. Dawn Chorus guided walk. 4am-6am, RSPB Old Moor. £7pp (includes breakfast), email old.moor@rspb.org.uk to book a place.

Email peterjmella@googlemail.com with any bird-related events you may have to promote here.

IMPORTANT! Overdue subscriptions

We still have some members that have yet to pay their 2010 subscriptions. If you are one of these people, then please be aware that unless a cheque wings its way to Jenny Kingsland as soon as possible, your membership will have lapsed and **this will be your final issue of the Bulletin!**

Deadline 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 **Saturday 29th May**.

Bulletin by email

More members have now agreed to take their Bulletins by email in PDF format. This is now about one-third of membership and this will help funds in cutting down the cost of sending out Bulletins, as it saves both printing and postage costs.

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.

THE LECTURES

Martin Garner - Frontiers of Birding

The February lecture was by Martin Garner, Sheffield resident and author of the book *Frontiers of Birding* (and, incidentally, winner of the SBSG's January Challenge!). Martin began by telling how his lifelong passion for birds largely began with a childhood sighting of bullfinch - his dream bird after seeing it in his Ladybird Book of Birds. Over the years he learnt of the structural differences of migrant Northern Bullfinches, and became determined to discover one for himself, finally realising this dream at Flamborough Head six years ago.

Martin's big passion is discovering how to identify subtle differences in birds, allowing the identification of birds not only on a specific level, but from various populations from around the world, going beyond what we limit ourselves with and pushing the boundaries of what we know about birds.

His far-ranging lecture took in various topics, including the subtle differences in eiders that allow the discovery of Northern, American and Pacific eiders among British flocks. He discussed other British "firsts" that may have been visiting for many years but previously overlooked, such as Pacific Fulmar, Glaucous-winged Gull, Cackling Canada Goose and Pacific Diver, simply because British birdwatchers aren't equipped with the identification skills to realise their significance.

He discussed his methods for learning to identify Yelkouan Shearwaters, tirelessly studying the subtleties of Manxes, as if for the first time, and then doing the same with Yelkouans in the Mediterranean. It was from this he discovered flight pattern differences and different habits - such as Yelkouans lifting their heads in flight. The latter observation was made of a probable Yelkouan Shearwater seen off the south coast - a possible first for Britain.

Other topics included the differences between Common and Wilson's Snipes, between British and migrant Robins and Song Thrushes, and of finding Arctic Redpolls in Hoyland. He challenged attitudes of "grumpy birders" who weren't looking properly and seeing birds with the wonder they deserved. He told a story of a great morning's birding seeing bar-tailed godwit, Greenland wheatear and the first Swifts of the year in NW Sheffield, but having a passing birder grumbling that there was nothing about and the birding was "crap today".

He told another story of a group of twitchers sulking at the no-show of a Brown Shrike at Flamborough, while completely failing to enjoy the fact there was a Radde's Warbler just down the cliffs.

Martin continued with tales of Large-billed Reed Warbler, a bird presumed extinct for 160 years and rediscovered,

but which is not an impossible migrant to turn up in Britain one day (and, in fact, a report of a large "super Blyth's Reed Warbler" sounds tantalisingly possible). He told of finding a Giant Canada Goose, once suspected to be extinct or even mythical, among the feral Canadas in Rother Valley country park.

Black and White-Winged Scoters were also discussed, as was the possibility of Slaty-backed Gulls being seen anywhere in the country. He ended with a tale of finding Taiga Flycatcher in a Foulda garden, and another of his younger days twitching an American Redstart, only to find it mobbing a mysterious shrike he still can't adequately ID (although probably an Isabelline).

The talk left the audience with some inspiring messages. Firstly always do your research and always be on your guard, because there are firsts for Britain out there waiting to be discovered, and they could show up anywhere. Secondly, don't end up a "grumpy birder", as there's always wonder to be found. And thirdly, even though Martin has such a huge knowledge about birds, he acknowledges that however much you know, there's always much, much more to learn and discover. And that's why birdwatching's such a fascinating and engaging hobby. Martin was thanked for his excellent and thought-provoking talk.

Pete Mella

Paul Medforth - Costa Rica

The main speaker at the March meeting was Paul Medforth, who presented in his own inimitable style a summary of the holiday he and his wife Janet took to Costa Rica in February 2009. The portents were bad: booked before the financial crash, the holiday cost more than anticipated, whilst Paul's collision with the Medforth moggie resulted in a broken toe, not diagnosed until some weeks later. As a result, an old and comfortable pair of trainers suddenly found a new lease of life. The tour company was not happy either: the other six people booked on the holiday dropped out for one reason or another. But their loss was the Medforths' gain, as Paul and Janet had the minibus to themselves, and the full attention of the tour guide, a rainforest obsessive.

Beginning in the capital, San Jose, the holiday took in some six or seven destinations in 13 days in different locations along much of the length of the

country. Despite Paul's wish to do some coastal birding almost the entire holiday was spent in tropical rainforest, much of it at altitude, with the attendant problem of altitude sickness.

The birding was superb, with some 385 species recorded during the holiday, all but eight or so being 'lifers.' Given the difficulties and frustrations of rainforest birding this was a considerable achievement. Ferruginous pygmy owl, blue-crowned motmot and the Costa Rican national bird, the clay coloured robin, were seen early on, with resplendent quetzal the reward for some hard going on a steep climb. A jeep ride to an upland valley brought mountain elenia, black phoebe and Costa Rican pygmy owl. Over 50 species of hummingbird occur, and Paul showed excellent photographs of sparkling violetear, purple-throated mountain gem and violet-headed hummingbird. Tanagers were numerous, with golden-headed, silver-

throated and speckled being among those encountered. Turkey vulture, roadside hawk and black vulture (strangely headless in Paul's photographs) were among the diurnal raptors listed. A rusty-margined flycatcher was probably the rarest bird seen.

Apart from birds there were sightings of land iguana, caiman, collared peccary, two- and three-toed sloth, white faced capuchin, coati and various frogs, geckos and lizards, including a bullfrog that had taken up residence in one of the cabins used by Paul and Janet.

Paul was thanked for an informative, entertaining and well-illustrated presentation about a species-rich and increasingly popular birding destination.

Rod Hinchliffe

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Norfolk Field Trip, Jan 2010

Despite the freezing conditions of January, the traditional SBSG field trip to Norfolk managed to fluke a snow-free weekend and the group were blessed with a rather sunny, if cold, day by the sea.

After stopping off for the obligatory bacon sarnies, we reached Holkham in good time, and was greeted to the magnificent sight of several thousand pink-footed geese loafing in the fields. No brents, white-fronts or the elusive snow goose were spotted at this point, although one or two barnacle geese were spotted among the pink-feet throng.

Barn owl and marsh harrier were seen hunting over the marshes, and ducks on show included goldeneye, shelduck and a very impressive flock of many hundred wigeon. A particularly showy male stonechat was another highlight.

On the beach snow bunting, rock pipit, knot and black-tailed godwit were seen, and little gull was among the birds over the sea. A few members of the group managed to obtain brief but good views of the firecrest that was hanging round the

area, gripping off the rest of the bus, many of which had spent some fair time squinting through goldcrests in vain!

After leaving we stopped by the roadside for another angle on the marshes, still failing to find the snow goose (although a white farmyard

Waders found included bar-tailed godwit, ruff, spotted redshank, grey plover, snipe, turnstone and sanderling, as well as very close views of little egret. Disappointingly only a single avocet was seen all day, with some of the lagoons still very low after recent work on the reserve.

Out to sea great northern diver, red-breasted merganser and eider were all seen by some members of the group, with a large raft of common scoter bobbing around quite far offshore, and a, thankfully much nearer, trio of velvet scoter giving good views and revealing their salient features.

Yet another brilliant field trip put on by

Paul Medforth, and one that got everyone's yearlists off to a flying start, provided a couple of lifers for some people on the bus, but most importantly was a cracking day's birding with great company, in one of the country's greatest birding hotspots. I can't wait for next year!

Pete Mella



Pete Mella

goose raised some temporary excitement), but managing to add white-fronts, a few more barnacles, and a couple of Egyptian geese to the day's tally.

Next stop Titchwell, where brent geese were finally found in the nearby fields as we arrived, and great views were had by many of the mealy redpoll that had been outside the reserve for a while.

Derwentdale Raptor Field Trip, Mar 2010

The weather in the days leading up to the morning of the trip had been good, but the forecast for the day itself did not look promising. However, I woke up to an overcast, but dry, North Derbyshire, and so headed towards Derwentdale with eager anticipation.

As I drove north, however, the skies were darkening and, sure enough,

as I turned off the A 57 towards Fairholmes, the first spots of rain hit the windscreen. Arriving at Windy Corner around 8.20 am, I found five group members who, like me, were hoping the weather would improve.

It didn't! The rain became heavier, mist lowered on to the hilltops, and by 9.00 am it was clear that no self-respecting raptor would be doing

any more flying that morning. We all beat a hasty retreat to our cars to dry out.

Thanks to the members who did turn up, and hopefully we will have better luck next year.

Ron Blagden

South Peak Raptor Study

Group Annual Report 2009

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 2009.

Mick Taylor introduced the Annual Report by noting that 2009 had seen a further worsening of breeding success of raptors in the Upper Derwent Valley north of Bamford and, in particular, there were no successful breeding by Peregrines for the first time for 25 years. Mick went on to say that, unless concerted and urgent action is taken, the area will be classed as one of the worst in Britain for raptor persecution. Fortunately there was better news from the south of the study area, with most species having a good year. The group also co-hosted the 2009 North of England Raptor and Upland Bird Conference which took place in November, after this Annual Report was published. It was a very successful event, and a report is available on the SBSG website.

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.

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 in the spring but none stayed to breed. Birds were again present in 2008, and skydancing, copulation and nest building took place. However, the female disappeared overnight 3/4 May and, a second female who was attracted by the male, disappeared overnight 19/20 May. It is most unusual for birds to disappear at that stage in the breeding cycle, and there was no evidence of natural predation. In 2009, birds were again present in and around the Upper Derwent Valley and the Eastern Moors but no breeding activity was seen.

As in all recent years, 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, four sites were occupied by adult birds early in the season: at two of these sites, the female disappeared prior to egg-laying, leaving unmated males in both territories; at the other two, cameras were installed for protection, and both were successful, fledging three and two young. Breeding success rates were again higher south of Bamford, although brood sizes there were lower than usual. It should be noted that some

regular sites were not monitored in 2009, but one new site, unusually occupied by two immature birds, successfully raised one youngster.

Sparrowhawks are not under close scrutiny by the group but sightings occur throughout the year, and local populations are believed to be stable.

Buzzards are now so widespread that it is not possible to visit all known sites. The group can confirm that at least 27 broods fledged successfully, raising at least 41 young, and have calculated that the number of pairs in the study area must now be in excess of 100; they estimate the breeding population for the county as a whole to be over 350 pairs. Unexplained failures continue to occur in the Upper Derwent Valley where, out of seven occupied sites, only three were successful, fledging four young. An adult bird was found freshly dead near a breeding site in April but appeared to have been eaten by a fox, and there were insufficient remains to ascertain cause of death.

After an exceptionally successful breeding season in 2008, numbers of **Kestrels** were, unsurprisingly, somewhat reduced in 2009. However, the species can still be seen in good numbers in suitable habitats, and the local populations seem to be stable. A total of 20 young were ringed.

Merlins had another successful

	Number of Occupied Sites					Number Successful					Number of Fledged Young				
	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09

Hen Harrier	-	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	10	-	-	-
Goshawk	16	18	23	24	15	11	12	14	11	7	18+	25+	26+	27+	13+
Buzzard	44+	69+	75+	80+	100+	17+	25+	30+	40+	27+	30+	35+	40+	50+	41+
Merlin	9	9	7	9	9	5	4	3	7+	6	21	13	8	24+	24
Hobby*	35	40	44	35	34	31	32+	28	25	28	72	73+	55	61	64
Peregrine**	17	23	28	32	29	11	14	11+	19+	17+	30	32	23+	41+	35+
Barn Owl	8	10+	10+	18	18	5+	10	10	12	18	24	28+	37	27	55+
LE Owl	2	3	3	8	2	1	2	2	1+	1	1	5	5	2+	1
SE Owl	11+	1	1	9	8	7+	1	1	2+	3	?	2+	4	5+	6
Raven	31+	31+	33	42+	37	15+	19+	20	16+	12	47+	48+	64+	48+	44+

* includes South Derbyshire; **includes North Staffordshire Sites

breeding season in 2009, including a pair occupying a new site and fledging four young. Only two sites were occupied in the Upper Derwent Valley area, down on previous years.

Hobbies also did well, and continued to spread northwards. The numbers in the table represent an underestimate, as there was reduced coverage in the south of the county in 2009. A previously colour-ringed individual returned to one site but failed to breed.

Peregrines overall enjoyed a fairly successful breeding season and the Roaches pair, which bred successfully in 2008 for the first time for 100 years, was again successful in 2009. As usual, there was a marked contrast in success rates in the north and the south, with none of the five monitored sites in Upper Derwentdale area being successful; in particular the Alport Castles pair again failed early in the season. There continues to be no feasible explanation for the disappearance of pairs in Derwentdale, other than human interference. Human disturbance was also suspected to be the cause of failure at a site in a disused quarry where birds had been successful previously. A total of three young birds were ringed at two White Peak Quarry sites.

There was continuing good news for the **Barn Owl** in 2009 with 16 broods, totalling 55 young, being ringed. Thanks were again extended to farmers who allowed nest boxes to be erected on their property.

Little Owls are not intensively studied by the group but breeding success appears to be about average, with young birds seen at some sites. At one site, two chicks were ringed from a brood of four.

The **Tawny Owl** is by far the commonest owl in the area, and is present in both rural and urban environments.

Another very poor year for **Long-Eared Owls**, with only one definite breeding record. The breeding/roosting site that was mentioned in the 2008 report as suffering disturbance held a displaying pair early in the season but, again, they failed to breed. Disturbingly, two sites that have been fairly successful in recent years were not occupied.

Short-eared Owls had a somewhat patchy breeding season: in some areas, breeding success was good, but in other previously successful sites, no birds were present. Following the "invasion" of the Eastern Moors in the winter of 2008/9, only one pair stayed to breed but this pair were thought to be successful – no nest visits were undertaken because of the site's vulnerability. Elsewhere, one site fledged



Martin Kramer



Andy Deighton



Andy Deighton

at least five young, and one chick was ringed at another site. Disappointingly, only two pairs were found in the Upper Derwentdale, where up to seven pairs were seen in previous years.

The numbers for **Ravens** in the table represent the success rate of the 37 nests that were checked; it was calculated that the total number of young fledged could be more than a hundred. Tree nests now account for 50% of the total.

Two other non-breeding species are also mentioned in the SPRSG report. There were again numerous sightings of **Red Kites** in the study area, and it is hoped that this species may breed in our area before too long. There were fewer records of **Marsh Harrier** in 2009, with only three records during the autumn passage; it is hoped that this is just a temporary blip, as the species continues to expand its breeding range throughout the UK.

The report also included a paper on the breeding success (or otherwise) of Goshawk, Buzzard, Peregrine and Raven for the years 2003-2009, comparing the Upper Derwent Valley with the White Peak area. This paper will be summarised in a future issue of the SBSG Bulletin.

Some Acknowledgments: The membership of the group in 2009 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. A feature of this year's report was the number and quality of the photographs, and Mick Taylor expressed his thanks to the photographers concerned, and to the members of the group who were involved in the production of the report. He also expressed his thanks to all the members of the group for their diligent fieldwork and expertise, and to the landowners who allowed access to their property.

Wendy Thompson

Closely Observed Thrushes: Pecking Order In Action

One garden, one big freeze, five species of thrush. **John Kirkham** sees how they got on...

The cold and snowiness of January gave me excellent opportunities to observe the competition behaviour of the five members of the thrush family; their interactions within and between species.

Food was scarce and hard to find. Much of the surface was inaccessible, the usual invertebrate prey unavailable. Most fruit and berry bushes had long been stripped. Consequently, a garden with food, food that was replaced as it was exhausted, attracted great attention, and the needs of the birds pressing, to defend a food site or to gain entry to the food resource by circumventing those defences.

For the first time in my twenty years of observing this garden, all five species were present once on January 14th, and there were nearly always three species for a full week. The pecking order was clearly mistle thrush - fieldfare - blackbird - song thrush - redwing, but there was more to it than a simple linear pattern of dominance.

A high proportion of the action was by blackbirds. There is a very assertive resident pair. The female is distinctive, with pale eye stripes and chest streaks, a bold and cocky demeanour, full of bounce, constantly minding their birds' business, chest thrust out. She is large and bouncy, has great presence, and has been around (unless her replacement is identical!) for an impressive eight years.

These two worked tirelessly to remove all other blackbirds, of which there could be up to ten. Some would be their own young of 2009, some from neighbouring territories where there was less feeding, some perhaps continental migrants here for the winter.

Presumably the calories expended were worth it in terms of calories protected from attack by other birds. It did not always seem that way, however, as spells of energy-saving quietness hardly

seemed to exist. Nor did the trespassing birds go quietly, running round in circles to try an outflanking action to return to the food, or flying all around the place before giving up, or retreating into shrubs where they took some removing.

I didn't help either, by placing food all round the garden to help all species, even the trespassers, I gave the residents far more patrolling to do.

There was, I think, always enough food for all, but the residents were clearly instinctively driven to clear off all competitors. They seemed to use far more calories that justified. To leave the intruders would not take the residents below the threshold of food needed for comfortable survival, but that is from my perspective, and my instincts are perhaps less geared to ensuing survival come what may.

The feisty female would take on any male, landing almost on them, or near to them, bouncing with confidence and running at them, so both the residents removed any other blackbird, regardless of gender.

“Over them all sat a mistle thrush in a birch top, ignoring, and ignored by, them all...”

Song thrushes were almost always picked on and chased off. The thrushes never put up any resistance, completely accepting their inferior pecking status, but food was spread in so many places that they managed to snatch food, especially when the blackbirds were busy with their own kind. I do wonder if increased blackbird intolerance of song thrushes is one factor in their decline, though I have never seen this referred to. Towards the end of the day, matters quietened, and the thrushes were allowed to loaf in the garden birches, and at this point neither species seemed to need to feed.

When two redwings appeared, the thrushes chased them, so any moral indignation they might have felt against the blackbirds was not taken to any ethical heart! And again, the redwings never resisted, but managed to feed when blackbirds involved with each other

or the thrushes. The thrushes regarded my garden as a territory, though they would only realise this in practice when allowed to do so. Food protection was very strong as a driving force, but within the genus not more widely. The thrushes would let starlings or finches eat the food they were protecting against other Turdidae.

Then a fieldfare put in an appearance, a one in a decade bird in my garden. The blackbirds made no aggressive move. The fieldfare did not chase the blackbirds, but the latter moved aside when the former hopped their way, trying to make their shift look quite unconnected with the fieldfare's growing proximity was how it looked from my anthropomorphic stance!

Neither did the fieldfare harass the redwings, and since they so often flock together, such behaviour would not be expected. The redwings showed no fear of fieldfares. It seems odd the birds three places apart in the pecking order are at ease with each other. Why? Are they bonded by their Icelandic or Scandinavian origin? By their roving existence in a foreign land? Since they often use the same food resources when here, competition rather than togetherness might be thought most likely.

Over them all sat a mistle thrush in a birch top, ignoring, and ignored by, them all. On the day when all five species were present, I saw no interaction. However, a nearby pair of rowan trees is where this mistle is often to be found, and until every berry has gone, any bird down the hierarchy is attacked and removed.

Interestingly, as soon as the weather improved, the song thrushes left, and I did not see them in the garden for two weeks. They live, I think, 400 metres away, in a garden where I assume less or no food was put out during the snow, but clearly a territory able to support them naturally in easier weather conditions, despite no doubt the attention of their own blackbirds.

RECENT SIGHTINGS

11th February - 31st March 2010

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

Bittern - One dropped into Pit-house West on 2nd March.

Little Egret - One at Rother Valley CP on 31st March.

Great White Egret - Seen and photographed at Thrybergh Tip on 27th February, and seen shortly afterwards SE over Rother Valley CP.

Whooper Swan - 4 over Carr Vale on 23rd February; 8 over Thrybergh CP on 24th February, 11 NW over Sheffield City Airport on 3rd March; 2 on Broomhead Res on 4th March; 19 N over Woodhouse Mill, and 11 adults and one juv on Ladybower Res, on 7th March; 37 NW over Orgreave Lagoons on 9th March; 2 over Bolsterstone on 21st March; 2 NW over Thrybergh Tip, and later on Silverwood Lagoon, on 22nd March.

Pink-footed Goose - Various skeins over the area, including maxima of 120 NW over Chatsworth and 150 NW over Langsett Res on 12th February; 350 in two skeins NW over Ecclesfield on 13th February; 100 over NW over Blackburn Meadows on 13th February; 80 west over Kilnhurst Ings on 15th February; 350 oNW over Silverwood Lagoon and 200 NW over Oughtibridge on 1st March; 95 NW over Carr Vale on 2nd March; 170 NW over Thrybergh CP on 4th March. Grounded birds included two at Chatsworth on various dates in February, two at RVCP on 23rd March, and singles at Graves Park (14th Feb), Waldershaigh (28th Feb), Damflask (13th Feb), Loxley Valley (16th Mar) and Thrybergh CP (25th Mar).

Barnacle Goose - 8 were grazing by the main hide at Thrybergh CP on 18th February.

Shelduck - Singles were at Silverwood Lagoon and Orgreave Lakes on 20th March. Pairs were at



This common crane was a stunning sight for one lucky observer, who saw it as it circled Ecclesall Woods on 2nd March.

Silverwood Lagoons on 29th March, and Orgreave Lakes on 31st. One was found dead at Silverwood Pit Top on 28th March.

Pintail - A full-winged female joined the pinioned pair at Graves Park from 14th February until at least the 7th March. 2 pairs briefly visited Thrybergh CP on 10th March.

Red-breasted Merganser - Single drake at Derwent Res (6th Mar) and Ladybower Res (27th Mar).

Red Kite - singles at **Baslow Edge (21st Feb), Silverwood Lagoon (23rd Feb), Hooton Roberts (14th Mar), Howden Dam (17th Mar), Gosforth Valley (18th Mar).**

Common Buzzard - Unusual record of one over Sheffield City Centre on 25th March.

Osprey - One SW over Lady Canning's Plantation towards Burbage Moor, and NW at Monsal Gead, on 27th March. One was over Redmires Reservoir on 28th, and another over Carr Vale on 30th.

Water Rail - Up to 2 recorded at Blackburn Meadows throughout February and March, and singles at Bolehill Flash (14th Feb), Pit-house West (2nd Mar), Thrybergh CP (7th and 23rd Mar), River Rother at Treeton (9th Mar), Harthill Res (10th Mar), Firsby Res (19th Mar), and Treeton Dyke (21st Mar).

Common Crane - **Pager report of single bird N over Beeley Moor on 2nd March, later seen and photographed circling over Ecclesall Woods before heading in direction of Ringinglow.**

Oystercatcher - Various records across the recording area, including twos at Langsett Res (15th/17th Mar), RVCP (15th-22nd Mar), Carr Vale (22nd Mar), Orgreave Lakes (22nd Mar) and Redmires (23rd Mar). Two pairs were at Redmires on 28th March.

Little Ringed Plover - The year's first record was one at Theybergh CP on 18th March, with 2 at Orgreave Lakes on 20th. 1 at

Redmires on 28th March was a rare March record at the site.

Ringed Plover - Various reports from Thrybergh CP, Orgreave Lakes and Silverwood Lagoons, with a maximum of 3 at Thrybergh, seen displaying on slipway on 17th February. 2 were over Parkgate Retail World on 31st March.

Golden Plover - A flock was present at Peat Pits from mid-February, reaching a peak of 500+ on 23rd March. Other maxima included 130 at Barlborough (11th Feb), 120 circling Orgreave (13th Feb), 90 at Ulley CP (7th Mar), 68 at Fulwood Head (7th Mar), 105 at Slatepit Lane (9th Mar), 500 over Thrybergh CP (22nd Mar), 73 at Freeburch (24th March), and a distant flock of 500 seen at Ravenfield (28th March),

Dunlin - 1 at Silverwood Lagoon on 18th March, and 3 at Orgreave Lakes on 20th March.

Jack Snipe - singles at Blackburn Meadows on 12th February and Silverwood Lagoon on 17th February-11th March, and up to 2 at Waverley Overcast on 28th February-20th March.

Curlew - First returning birds were on 28th Feb at Waldershaigh, Whitwell Moor, Rocher Cliffs, Ecclesall and Middleton Moor. Maxima included 59 at Middleton Moor (19th Mar) and 25+ at Edale

(19th Mar).

Redshank - A maximum of 5 at RVCP on 21th March, with singles at Orgreave Lakes, Silverwood Lagoon, Middleton Moor and Thrybergh CP.

Green Sandpiper - Up to two recorded at Centenary Way Riverside up to 16th March. Single calling at Blackburn Meadows on 12th February.

Black-headed Gull - Largest count was c1600 roosting at Lagsett Res on 12th Feb. Other good counts included 800+ at Broomhead Res (13th Feb), 200 at Poolsbrook (21st Feb), 160 at Theybergh CP (7th Mar), 250+ at Firsby Res (19th Mar), and 150 at Middleton Moor (22nd Mar).

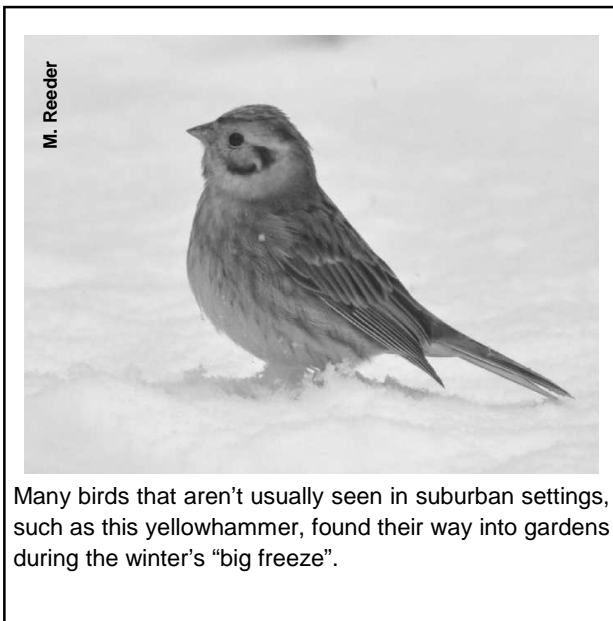
Caspian Gull - one adult at Poolsbrook CP on 5th March.

Common Gull - The biggest counts were 150 at Middleton Moor on 22nd Feb, and 70 at Langsett Res on 28th Feb.

Kittiwake - 2nd W or adult winter on water with common gulls at Thrybergh CP on 21st Feb.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - Records include birds at Beeley Wood (male on 5th March, female on 13th March), Cobnar Wood/ Graves Park (male and female 7th March, 2 males drumming 15th March), and drumming at Rivelin Valley (16th March).

Sand Martin - First record of the year was 2 N over Carr Vale on 18th



Many birds that aren't usually seen in suburban settings, such as this yellowhammer, found their way into gardens during the winter's "big freeze".

March. Singles were at Thrybergh, Firsby and Catcliffe Flash on 19th, and there were 4 at Orgreave Lakes and 11 at Rother Valley CP on 20th. Maximum counts at time of writing 20+ at RVCP on 22nd, and 14 over Thrybergh CP on 23rd.

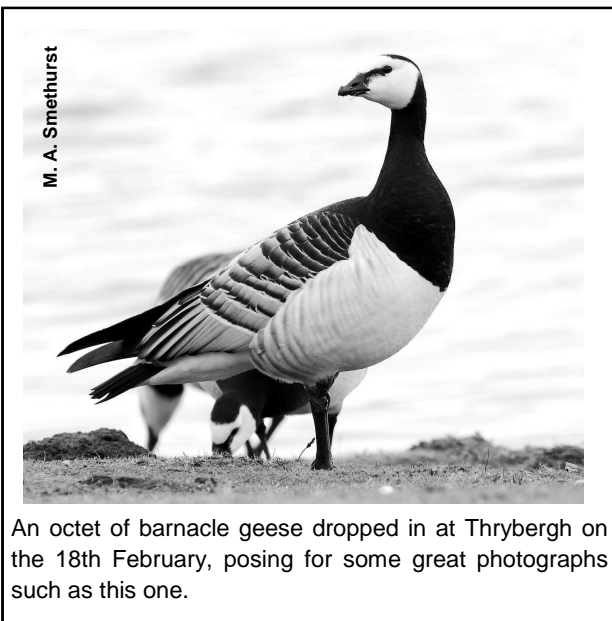
House Martin - Early record at RVCP on 21st March.

Swallow - 2 were over Pit-House West on 23rd March, followed by one over the River Don at Attercliffe (24th), 1 at Thrybergh CP (25th), 3 also at Thrybergh on 29th, 1 at Ulley CP (30th), 1 at Carr Vale (30th), 2 at High Green (30th) and 8 at Thrybergh (31st), 1 at Silverwood Lagoons (31st) and 20 at Thrybergh (31st).

Waxwing - 2 at Kimberworth on 13th Feb, and 1 at Greystones on 20th Feb, were probably the last birds of a very meagre winter for this species.

Stonechat - A pair were feeding at Big Moor on 7th March. A male was in song at Ramsley Reservoir on the 14th and a male was seen at Strines on 14th, and a pair were seen back on territory at Burbage Valley on the 18th.

Wheatear - The first of the year was one at Barlborough on 19th March, followed by 7 at Freeburch (22nd), 2 at Wharnccliffe Chase (22nd), 1 at Orgreave Lakes (22nd), up to 8 at



An octet of barnacle geese dropped in at Thrybergh on the 18th February, posing for some great photographs such as this one.

Peat Pits (from 23rd onwards), and 4 at Shilito Wood (26th).

Fieldfare - The biggest counts included 115 at Silverwood Wood (24th Feb), 120 at Slatepit Lane (9th Mar), 250 at Peat Pits (21st Mar), 147 at Firsby Res (21st Mar), 300 at Edge Mount (23rd Mar), 120 at Leash Fen (27th Mar) and 270 at Firsby Res (31st Mar).

Redwing - Biggest counts included 110 at Stubley Hollow (13th Feb), 100+ at Oakwood Technology College at Moorgate, Rotherham (15th Feb), 90 in the Mayfield Valley (7th Mar), 78 at Whirlow (18th Mar), 70 at Graves Park (19th Mar) and 50 at Middleton Moor (19th Mar).

Ring Ouzel - One was at Bamford Edge on 28th March.

Blackcap - Wintering birds remained at Woodseats, Walkley Bank, Sharrow, Greystones, Heeley, Brincliffe Edge, Grenoside and Handsworth. Singing was recorded from the wintering birds at Walkley Bank (from 25th Feb) and Greystones (19th Mar), and one was singing at Bowden Housteads Wood on 21st March.

Chiffchaff - One was flycatching at Catcliffe Flash on 4th March. The first singing birds were recorded from Baslow SF and Carr Vale on 18th March, with others at Thrybergh, Firsby, Ulley Res and Salmon Pastures on the 19th, and Rother Valley, Millhouses, Loxley and Treeton Dyke on 21st. A spread across the area over the following weeks included 4 at Shirebrook Valley (22nd), 6 at Firsby Res (24th), and 4 at Silverwood Wood (26th).



This Caspian gull was at Poolsbrook on 5th March.

Brambling - A few lingering in the area, including 1 at Baslow (11th Feb), up to 12 at Lodge Moor (until at least 12th Mar), up to 5 at Longshaw (until at least 1st Mar), up to 5 at Chatsworth (until at least 27th Feb), 1 in Mayfield Valley (21st Feb), 1 at Stocksbridge (28th Feb), 3 N at Redmires Res (7th Mar), 3 at Hollingdale (13th Mar), 4 at Redmires Res (21st Mar), 20 at Peat Pits (21st Mar), 6 at Hollingdale (21st Mar), 3 at Edge Mount (23rd Mar) and 1 at Redmires (28th Mar).

Siskin - Maximum counts were 40 at Langsett (12th Feb), 65 at Linacre Res (14th Feb), 60 at Rivelin Filters (16th Feb), 70 at Blacka Moor (21st Feb), 60 at Broomhead Res (28th Feb), 40 in the Loxley Valley (28th Feb), 100 at White Lee Moor (6th Mar). 8 at Redmires Res on 21st March included 4 singing/displaying males.

Common/Mealy Redpoll - 2 were at Pit-house West on 27th Feb, and 1 was feeding in alders at Ulley CP on 7th and 13th March.

Crossbill - The biggest counts were 29 at Langsett (18th Feb), 19 at Westend Valley (9th Mar) and 25 at Holling Dale (21st Mar). Elsewhere 14 were at Broomhead Res on 14th Feb, 3 at King Tree on 2nd March, 2 at Fearfall Wood on 7th March, 12 at Thornseat on 13th March, one and twos reported at Redmires (7th, 13th and 21st Mar), 2 at Smeekley Wood (14th Mar), 3 at Alport Valley (17th Mar), and 1 at Whitwell Moor (27th Mar).

Snow Bunting - One was heard calling at Westend Moor on 1st March.

Corn Burning - 8 opposite the pub at Pebley on 12th March, and 15 at Barlborough Hall Park on the 13th.

Pete Mella

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

S. Ashon, B. Bailey, S. Bailey, S.J. Barnes, A. Baverstock, M.A. Beevers, A.R. Bell, R.P. Blagden, K. Bower, S.J. Branch, M.C. Brew, P.L. Brown, R. Butterfield, D.J. Buttle, D.M. Bye, J. Crooks, R. Dale, A. Deighton, K. Dutton, M. Dyson, M.G. Fenner, P. Garrity, K.R. Gould, R. Greasley, S. Guymmer, A. Hill, R.D. Hill, J. Hornbuckle, C. Hurst, A. Johnson, J.E. Kenward, J. Kingsland, K. Knowles, M. Kramer, P. Leonard, J.L. Marriott, C. Measures, P.R. Medforth, P. Mella, M. Miller, T.H. Minkskip, M.G. Oxlade, D. Parkes, N.R. Porter, M. N. Reeder, B. Roberts, S.J. Roddis, S. Samworth, L. Sanders, J. Sherwin, M. Sherwin, M.A. Smethurst, M. Snook, B. Spencer, D. Stables, P. Thomas, A. Thompson, M. Timms, R. Twigg, C. Tyler, S.E. Vickers, D. Warbuton, R.D.R. Williams, D. Wood, D. Woodriff, P. Wragg, Rotherham and District Ornithological Society, Sorby-Breck Ringing Group, BTO Birdtrack.

Local Birding with David Woodriff

David Woodriff begins a birding diary from his local haunts... See page 2 for his introduction.

March 2010

How excellent is Spring!? The weather has improved and the reaction from the birds is fantastic with song, species vying for territory, birds returning to the uplands and the chance of some early migrants making an appearance.

Each week I make the odd trip over the A628 Woodhead pass which allows me to divert slightly for a quick half-hour look around the Midhope / Langsett area.

I have 5 or 6 spots where I park up and scan around. In the recent past these places have provided me with memorable views of several raptors, flocks of Crossbill, Stonechat and Cuckoo.

On the 3rd March, several Lapwings had returned to the area and were displaying and Curlew numbers had just reached double figures. The Song Thrush is a special bird for me, probably due to the reported decline in numbers nationally which makes me appreciate them more. Two were singing on this day and this area seems well stocked with the species.

I made my first visit of the year on the 4th March to Wharnccliffe Chase. This place is like a magnet to me and I have often foregone visiting more bird renowned places just to walk my well trodden route around the area.

On each visit I either hear or see Green Woodpecker which certainly breed in the area. What a curious species! There are several isolated trees on the Chase and they have often darted away from these without me realising they were there in the first place. At present an individual is often calling from a wooded area to the west of the Chase and could be prospecting for a nest site?

Nuthatches were showing well and both Mistle Thrush and Goldfinch were singing and showing territorial behaviour. All three of these species can be seen in good numbers on the Chase and I have recorded post breeding groups of 50+ Mistle Thrush and 100+ Goldfinch in recent years.

The most amazing spectacle on this occasion however was the sight of eight Common Buzzards in the area.

Wharnccliffe Chase is high up and affords views over a great distance – particularly to the east. In a single wide ranging scan I picked up four over Stocksbridge and pairs together over Wortley and High Green. When I first began birding in the 80s, I didn't see one in the SBSG area but they must surely now be our most common raptor?

On the 5th March, my parking spot overlooking Midhope Res produced close views of three Wigeon and around 15 Teal were flighty around the water. Two pairs of Goosander were towards the distant shore – a former bogey bird of mine but now I see them everywhere.

Further up the lane, seven Song Thrush were seen or heard around the western entrance to Langsett Woods plus Great Spotted Woodpeckers were drumming and Siskin were calling as they flew overhead.

Wharnccliffe Chase was alive with Skylarks on the 7th March. At least 9 were around and most were singing proficiently or undertaking sorties against/with near neighbours as they begin to stake a claim for partners/territory. Yellowhammer fair well on the Chase but so far have got off to a slow start with only 1 heard singing today. The immediate area must support at least 7 or 8 pairs.

The 11th March had the first displaying Meadow Pipits on the Chase and a single Curlew had returned. I suspect Curlew breed on an eastern facing bank but I have never been able to prove this. Three Redwing were around – could these be the last of the season? Numbers seem to have been down this year to me?

I altered my route home from work on the 12th March to look over a field near Bolsterstone that holds good numbers of Golden Plover. Around 500 birds were there and I scanned through to see if there were any other species within the flocks.

I "discovered" this site whilst scanning across the valley from Wharnccliffe Chase whilst vis-migging in October last year. On this occasion I saw dense flocks of birds in huge numbers (2-3000?) that I suspected were Goldies but couldn't be certain due to the distance. I pinpointed the area from a local map that I have and eventually found the field a week or two later when an opportunity arose.

I have just found out that that my "discovered" site is actually Peat Pits

which seems to be a well-known site for Goldies. Oh well!

Each Saturday I drop my daughter off at a dancing class in Ecclesfield and have taken to having a quick walk around a patch of former industrial land below Smithy Wood nearby.

Only a few weeks ago this provided me with one of my favourite sights – over flying Pink-footed Geese in wavering V formations. On the 13th March however it was a raptor day with a displaying pair of Sparrowhawk, two male Kestrels hunting and then a Buzzard lifted up from the woods and provided great close up views.

On the 17th March, a pair of Oystercatcher sat nonchalantly on the dam wall at Langsett Res in the evening as I drove home from work.

The 19th March gave me my first sightings this year of returning migrants. A Sand Martin flew up the River Rother behind Catcliffe Flash and 2 Chiffchaff were singing around the NE arm of Ulley Reservoir.

A walk around Wharnccliffe Chase before work on the 22nd March was very fruitful. Good numbers of upland birds were around with c100 Meadow Pipits, c20 Skylarks and between 8 and 10 Curlews. A couple of male Wheatears were feeding behind a small group of Fieldfares with the odd Starling and Mistle Thrush also within the party.

There's something about Wheatears that draw me in – and I just don't know why? They are an amazing looking bird and I'm always pleased to see them but they just don't do much do they? Despite this, I always find myself having one last look before moving on just in case they're not here next time. So far I've not found any breeding on the Chase despite several pairs being around during the early part of most seasons.

On the 23rd March, five Snipe were displaying over Langsett Moor. A pair of Little Grebe had returned to Midhope Res and pairs of Teal and Goosander remained alongside a solitary male Wigeon.

On the same day there were around 500 Golden Plover at Peat Pits. Whilst observing these from the protection of my car (light rain falling), a party 8 Wheatears appeared from nowhere only feet away and, yep, I couldn't take my bins off them!