

Sheffield Bird Study Group

BULLETIN



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Bulletin

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THE MIGRANTS RETURN

**The first dates - plus a host
of spring passage goodies -
in the recent sightings (p9)**

MAGICAL MULL

**A week on the northern
birdwatching paradise (p6)**

PLUS!

**News and announcements
Local Birding column
Lecture and field trip reports
Indoor meeting survey**



NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Committee Matters

As many members will already know, Rod Hinchliffe has joined the Committee, which brings it up to full strength for the first time in some years - so a warm welcome to you Rod.

More good news: Martin Hodgson has volunteered to take over as Membership Secretary from Jenny. So many thanks are due to Jenny for her hard work over the past few years, and to Martin for his

hard work to come in the next few! See below for Martin's introductory profile.

Member Profile - Martin Hodgson

When I joined SBSG two and a half years ago, I didn't imagine I would be taking on a role such as membership secretary by now, or even at all - mainly because I quickly judged myself to be well below the average of the membership in terms of birding knowledge. I'm one of those people whose knowledge plateaued at an early age, and who never quite found sufficient opportunities to increase it when I was working full-time.

Joining SBSG has given me an impetus to get myself up to a higher level. David Williams in his website profile says he came to bird-watching rather late in life. Well, David, I came to real bird-watching much, much later as a 65 year old here in Sheffield. Fortunately I'm

assured by our Chairman that bird knowledge isn't a criterion for this job. And maybe my 30+ years in Inland Revenue will be a better qualifier! (We have ways of making you pay etc).

When I'm not trying to juggle binoculars, camera, bird guide and notebook in my hands, I chair a nationwide charity which gives free tax advice to older people who are on modest incomes and who can't make sense of their dealings with the Revenue (www.taxvol.org.uk). And, as you know from Members Nights, I do some overseas business consultancy, which allows me to see a range of different birds at someone else's expense.

My thanks to Jenny for the immaculate

condition of the membership records she has handed on to me, for her instructions and for her advice on how our processes might be improved, eg the use of standing orders. I shall be taking this forward with the committee, but would welcome further suggestions from members on how to improve their experience of membership.

Please feel free to contact me at [martinhodgson@btinternet.com](mailto:martinjhodgson@btinternet.com) on any membership issue.

Martin Hodgson

If you'd like to introduce yourself with a few paragraphs for fellow members then please email peterjmella@googlemail.com

Reasons To Be Cheerful... Part 2!

April 2010 and I'm feeling good about the world. The Magpies have confounded the pundits. Newcastle United are champions of the Championship. A cause for joy in one small corner of Sheffield but I reckon something else in black and white in April is worth a wider celebration.

Sheffield Bird Study Bulletin, Number 202. Have another look at it. I trust editor Pete Mella's modesty won't prevent him from publishing this but the man's done a cracking job in producing an increasingly professional document in recent months and the April Bulletin is the best yet. So well done to him.

But this isn't just about how good the Bulletin appears. Look at the content, at the quality and at the variety of contributions from a number of members. Page one: a fine Sparrowhawk photo by Marco Wood-Bonelli, that rarest of Sheffield sightings, a young teenage birder. Inside, a wide range of items which really does reflect the breadth of interest that our hobby entails. So there's the pleasure of local patchwork from David Woodriff and patchwork at the micro level with John Kirkman's closely observed garden thrushes. Further afield, Pete Mella gives us an account of the January Norfolk Field Trip and further

still, Rod Hinchliffe does justice to Paul Medforth's talk on Costa Rica. Pete, clearly working on overtime, summarises Martin Garner's "Frontiers in Birding" talk, not an easy task given the breadth and quality of that presentation but does enough to reinforce the fact that over the last several years we've had a run of excellent speakers at indoor meetings. And that too is worth a shout and a big thankyou to Margaret Miller for making that possible.

And then there's the "news" element of the Bulletin; Matt Capper's update on the Eastern Moors, Wendy Thompson's excellent summary of the South Peak Raptor Study Group's report and as comprehensive a Recent Sightings feature that I can ever recall seeing and nicely illustrated with a range of members' photographs.

Including pictures, there are contributions from at least 13 members in the April Bulletin. In addition, "Recent Sightings" has records from 69 observers. Credit then also to Simon Bailey for kick starting the rejuvenated website and to David Williams and others for processing the data and getting sightings out to us so quickly and efficiently. SBSG Bulletin 202, definitely a reason to be cheerful.

And a final thought. I started with a foot-balling reference and I shall end on one. The current cheapest season prices for the city's two league clubs are as follows; Sheffield Wednesday; £360, Sheffield United, £369. That I think entitles you to about 34.5 hours entertainment per year and works out at a rate of about £10.60p per hour.

SBSG annual membership costs £14. Add together time spent at 10 indoor meetings (20 hours), the time it takes to thoroughly read five bulletins and an annual report (say 5 hours), attendance at a couple of local field trips (4 hours) and time spent looking at or putting information into the website during the course of a year (4 hours?) and you get a fairly similar total of 33 hours. And if my arithmetic is correct, enjoying the benefits of SBSG membership costs you about 42p an hour. And if that isn't brilliant value for money I don't know what is.

Pete Brown

Thanks to Pete for the kind words about the new look Bulletin! And if anyone wants to add themselves to the growing list of contributors, then please get in touch - PM.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Indoor Meetings

Andy Deighton - North India

Wed 8th September 2010, Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5

SBSG member Andy Deighton will need no introduction to many members of the group, who will be familiar with his consummate bird ID and photography skills. Tonight he will be talking about two 'off the beaten track' travels to northern India, to Gujarat and Assam. Andy had some amazing wildlife encounters while out there, and the talk will take us through salt flats, wetlands, grasslands, semi desert, dry forest, grassland and the forests of the Himalayas, with a twitch for the rediscovered Forest Owlet thrown in for good measure. Expect some fantastic photography of some unforgettable wildlife.

Paul Hobson -

Techniques in Successful Wildlife Photography

Wed 13th October 2010, Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5

Paul is a Sheffield-based, full-time wildlife photographer, who supplies work to a variety of organisations and publications, and conducts wildlife photography workshops. He is Amateur Photographer's wildlife photography masterclass expert of 2010, and writes a monthly wildlife article for Derbyshire Life, as well as being responsible for Natural England's wildlife photography throughout the East Midlands and Peak District. Tonight he will be sharing some of his expert knowledge, covering a range of photographs and species.

Field Meetings

Coming soon...

Gulls at Redmires (early September)

Richard Hill will be leading this trip to the Redmires gull roost in September, hoping to spot a few yellow-legs, Caspians or even something rarer among the assembled flock. A great opportunity to get to grips with a complicated set of species, with experts on hand to help out with potentially tricky IDs.

Please keep your eyes on the website for the date of this field trip, which may be announced late on to take advantage of good weather.

For details of minibus field trips please contact Paul Medforth on 01246 418120 or 07968 092032, or keep checking the website for announcements.

OTHER GROUPS' DATES TO NOTE

21st July - The Mammals of Old Moor. Mammal-themed guided walk at RSPB Old Moor, 8.30am. Adults £4, children £2, RSPB members half price. Booking essential old.moor@rspb.org.uk

2nd Sept - RSPB Sheffield Group Indoor Meeting. Steve Cale will be talking on 'The Art of Birds'. 7.30pm, Central United Reformed Church, Sheffield.

14th August - Optics Day, RSPB Old Moor. Equipment demo at RSPB Old Moor. All day.

24th Sept - DOS Indoor Meeting Paul Hobson will be talking on 'Peak District Birds'. 7.30pm, The Evergreen Club, Allestree, Derby.

25th Sept - Wader Walk, RSPB Old Moor. Wader-themed guided walk - beginners welcome. 10am-12noon. Adults £4, children £2, RSPB members half price. Booking essential old.moor@rspb.org.uk

7th October - RSPB Sheffield Group Indoor Meeting. Geoff Facer will be giving a talk entitled 'India - Taj, Tigers and Birds', plus the group's AGM. 7.30pm, Central United Reformed Church, Sheffield.

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

Deadline for next Bulletin

The next Bulletin will be issued at the October 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 25th September**.

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

Stephen Murphy - Hen Harriers

The April lecture was given by Stephen Murphy of Natural England, who has studied hen harriers for 8 years in England, mainly but not exclusively in their stronghold in the Forest of Bowland. Stephen's talk covered a range of topics including field characteristics, the growth of knowledge about hen harriers, population changes over the last 250 years, conservation and predation. He concluded by showing recent breeding data and discussing the results of his own ongoing research.

Hen harriers favour open spaces and hunt by hugging contours. Prey is taken by either the wing-over method or by direct stoop. This latter approach allows the bird to gain speed and bind to its prey, which ranges from small passerines to game birds, and small mammals to young rabbits and leverets.

In early times the marked sexual dimorphism led to males and females being considered as separate species, an error corrected by George Montagu in the early nineteenth century. George Low (1747-1795) recorded the taking of domestic poultry, a habit from which the bird got its name. The hen harrier thrived in the mid-eighteenth century on the eight million acres of 'waste land' then in existence. A century earlier there had been a price on its head, varying from 6d to 1/6d per bird.

Improvements in shotgun design in the mid-nineteenth century were a major factor in the slump in

numbers of most British birds of prey, and the hen harrier was effectively extinct in England by the end of the century. Numbers increased during the world wars and the bird was back in northern England in the 1960s, with up to 25 pairs in the country as a whole in the 1970s and 1980s. Currently the UK has 550-820 pairs of which only 19 were found in England in 2008; of these, 14 were in Bowland. It is estimated that England could support some 230 pairs. The world population is believed to be around 22,000 pairs.

That numbers remain so low, at a time when the fortunes of other English raptors are generally improving, clearly points to persecution as a major factor. Whilst some persecution is indirect, through deliberate disturbance at nest sites for example, the major factor is the shooting of adults in favourable breeding habitats. However, not all nesting failures are due to human activity; in Bowland, where foxes are controlled, there is a 66% breeding success, as compared to 23% in Ireland where foxes are not controlled.

Stephen discussed the changes needed to improve the hen harrier's perilous position in England. There is a pressing need to maintain a dialogue with the shooting fraternity in order to resolve conflict. The support of land owners, such as the Duke of Westminster in Bowland, is critical. Whilst individual nest protection is too expensive, measures such as diversionary feeding do work. A more radical

possibility is the introduction of the species, by transport of young birds from natal sites, to suitable but currently unoccupied areas such as Exmoor.

Stephen concluded by discussing his own work on the dispersal ecology of the hen harrier in England, aimed in part at finding where young birds go in their first and most demanding year, thereby producing an information source for future land management. The use of wing tags has provided sufficient data to study dispersal, in some cases from fledgling to breeding adult. Bowland birds have been recovered in southern Ireland and Denmark. Satellite tracking has proved much more efficient however, and has indicated that birds do not disperse to the coast in winter, as was long believed. This technique has led to the discovery of important roosts and wintering sites in Yorkshire, Cumbria and Northumberland. It is sensitive enough to differentiate between hunting and roosting activity and has indicated that some hen harriers fly at night.

Stephen was thanked for an expert and fact-filled presentation about an iconic species of great conservation concern.

Rod Hinchliffe

Apologies to anyone waiting for a write up of the May lecture, our usual scribes were unavailable. Graham Appleton is thanked by the group or a well-received and informative lecture on Iceland.

News in brief

Rother Valley Migrants - an apology

Apologies to any members who attended the spring migrants event at RVCP in April. The event leader, Kevin Gould, had car trouble on the way down and never made his destination. We hope anyone who did make the journey had a pleasant morning anyway.

Online records milestone

On 18th April the 20,000th record was downloaded from the group's website. This is an staggering number, and many thanks to all members who take the trouble to send in their sightings, and helping to create a valuable data bank. A kudos also to Simon Bailey and David Williams for implementing the online submission so successfully.

Digiscoping Kit for sale

Anyone fancy their hand at digiscoping? Visitors to the website can pick up a Nikon 995 camera and a full array of accessories that will allow you to get cracking, for the bargain price of £100. What's more the full amount will go towards the Atlas Fund. For full details see the website, and snap it up before someone else does!

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Spurn Field Trip - May 2010

The minibus arrived at Paternoster Row at 7.00am to be met by eleven eager SBSG members. Paul Medforth disembarked and immediately began his team building exercise by involving us in the decision making process, Lincolnshire coast or Yorkshire coast? A rapid consultation ensued and we were off to Spurn.

We arrived at Spurn at the Bluebell car park just before 9am. Paul continued his team building by cleverly parking the minibus just off the tarmac, ensuring it was firmly stuck in the mud in a deep and very extensive puddle. A problem solving exercise for us! Everyone got off the minibus and arranged themselves at the rear of the bus ready to push, with Pete Brown directing and pushing from the side door (cynics would say he had picked the only point where he was unlikely to get wet feet or be splattered by mud, but others would realise it was to get an overview of the situation.). The bus came free at the second attempt, with, thankfully, very little mud being thrown about.

We split into small "teams" and went off in separate directions with instructions from Paul to return at midday to the minibus to exchange information (or could it be for lunch?).

Pete Brown and I decided to do some sea-watching first, but after persecuting ourselves for some time and seeing nothing except for three Gannets and the occasional Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gull we decided to cut our losses and move on to the Triangle.

We were rewarded almost immediately by a small party of about 10 Whimbrel in the fields near the Canal Scrape. The area around the Canal Scrape produced singing Linnet, Reed Bunting, Chiffchaff, Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat as well as Tree Sparrow and the commoner finches with good views of all species being obtained. Further study of the Whimbrel from a different angle also produced a single Wheatear and the first of two Barn Owls in the area, very different looking birds, one a very pale individual and the other a much browner bird.

The mudflats in the Humber Estuary produced good numbers of Grey Plovers, many in superb plumage, hundreds of Dunlin and small numbers of Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Redshank and Curlew. Several Brent Geese were present, still hanging on in the area, resisting the urge to migrate.

Back to the Bluebell car park and a further party of 18 Whimbrel flew over our heads and out to sea. Meeting up with the others we heard Beacon Ponds had produced, amongst other things, singing Grasshopper Warbler and Little Terns with pager reports of Wood Sandpiper at North Cave. A team decision was made to give Spurn till 2pm and then call in at North Cave on the way back.

Pete and I set off for Beacon Ponds. We failed to see or hear the

Grasshopper Warbler but managed to connect with the Little Terns (after all there were about 40 of them so they were difficult to miss). Apart from this there was very little in the area, more warblers (Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat and Chiffchaff), Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, a further party of 13 Whimbrel flying over and a farmer enquiring after 4 cows he had misplaced. Sadly we were unable to help him.

Back to the minibus and on to North Cave Wetlands. The Wood Sandpiper was very obliging, giving superb views to all. Also present were 4 Avocets with Lapwing and Little Ringed Plover to add to the day list as well as Willow Warbler, Blackcap and Garden Warbler, it was turning out to be a Warbler Fest! All the common warbler species apart from Wood Warbler had been seen! Three Buzzards put in an appearance, giving excellent views as they soared overhead. Some lucky members also managed to get onto a Red Kite as it flew over the reserve. A Yellow Wagtail was present plus a couple of parties of Red-legged Partridge and, as we left the reserve, we managed to connect with 2 Swifts, surprisingly our first of the day.

Another great day thanks to Paul Med, 85 species being seen in total with some great moments to savour: the Whimbrels, the warblers, the Grey Plovers, the Little Tern colony, the Wood Sandpiper to name but a few. When's the next trip?

Mike Fenner

Survey volunteers needed

As you may be aware, we are sometimes approached by organisations that require bird surveys conducted on their land, often for conservation purposes. These are generally carried out on behalf of the group by our members and the proceeds are shared between the member(s) and the group. In recent years we have undertaken large scale surveys on behalf of the National Trust, Severn Trent Water and the Forestry Commission, as well as smaller one-off surveys at a variety of sites throughout the area. These vary from one-off surveys involving a handful of visits to studies spanning a whole breeding season or

year to long term monitoring of populations trends over a number of years.

This work continues to be an important source of funds for the group, generating resources that allow us to undertake our own projects, such as the publication of the annual reports and the forthcoming Sheffield Breeding Atlas.

Due to the fact that we often have to act quickly in order to accept an offer of survey work, the Committee thought it might be good idea to collate a list of experienced observers,

who we could potentially call on if the need arises.

If you are interested in putting yourself forward, please contact Richard Hill at Secretary@sbsg.org with your name, contact details (e-mail or telephone) and some indication of which part of the Sheffield area you would be able to cover e.g. N, S, E or W.

Thanks.

A week on Mull

John Kirkman spent a week on the magical Hebridean island of Mull, and shares his experiences - and comparisons with the birdlife of his corner of Sheffield - with us.

In the third week of April, Susan and I spent a week in Mull, and a great many surprises met us, two amateur naturalists conditioned by decades of experiences in Middle England.

Crossing the Firth of Lorn on April 17th, we were too early for the return of Gannets and Manx Shearwaters, so the crossing was relatively unproductive except for a few Black Guillemots off Oban. We lived in hope that the return journey on April 24th would be fuller as Gannets and shearwaters were arriving, but no luck again, as with the Basking Sharks, which frequent these inshore firths - but from early May!

As you pass Dumbarton and head for Loch Fyne and the Argyll coast, you say goodbye to Carrion Crows and hello to the hooded variety. There seems to be next to no transition zone where both are present, and no inter-breeding, though the two seem to be regarded by some as a single true species. Certainly they are genetically much closer than are Herring Gulls and Lesser Black-backs, which are known occasionally to breed with each other.

The narrow line between the two crows suggests that the one never "trespasses" in the wrong region, or that if they do, soon die or are killed. The Hoodies are fine fellows, full of resources and bounce, feeding in every Argyll environment, farm, seaweed coast, village, forest and moor. They are successful birds, but are not spreading, yet we know not what restricts them geographically. Their two tone makes them look like nimble and noisy old vicars or nuns released from the confines of their

calling.

All the hirundines were in, Swallows in small numbers, Sand and House Martins in plenty. One day was cold and sunny, with a temperature of 5°C, but a northerly persistent gale made it feel like -5°C. These conditions ensured insects were hiding away, but all along any sea loch with a mud or seaweed shore there were hirundines galore, all concentrating their efforts along a narrow line where seaweed flies and sandhoppers were available.

Another day was calmer, 8°C and wet, and still the birds hunted, on a better day for insects. Even our poor eyes could see the start of the infamous Hebridean summer insect swarm.

“Despite the size disparity, the Golden Eagle wins any disputes, and having a far more aggressive temperament, often engineers such fallouts!”

The big surprise was the earliness of these birds. We saw dozens of House Martins in Cockermouth, Cumbria, on April 5th, and those in Mull soon after, yet my local colony at Tolley Rise has none until April 29th. The North Atlantic Drift might well brush up the Atlantic coast, but conditions were hardly encouraging for such a northward venture so easy. My understanding is that the migratory urge is indeed powerful, but that it is moderated by weather, and that northerly birds will stay south for a while, not so these hardy souls.

Meadow Pipits were everywhere, and not only on the moors. Any pasture at or near sea-level had its company, and they ran and skipped over garden lawns as well, making it clear why they nudge towards two million pairs in the UK. Almost as widespread, but in smaller numbers, were Pied Wagtails. We saw one

lawn with wagtails, pipits, Robins, Dunnocks and Wheatears, and our cottage garden was also visited by a flock of a dozen Twites, which are now sought in vain in the Sheaf gathering grounds below Tolley Moss.

The Scotland/England Willow Warbler divergence was well exemplified, where northerly warblers continue in numbers little diminished but the southerly populations are in decline. Every thicket contained a Willow, and some copses were only 50 metres across and were as yet leafless and presumably hosted limited invertebrate prey. The weather was at times cold, wet and windy, and still the birds sang their looping tones. Nearer home, Poynton Wood, far larger than the Mull spinneys, has had no Willow Warbler for five years, though two did sing at the foot of Twentywell Lane in May. Has there been a theory about warblers' geographical disparities?

Never have I seen so many Herons. They were neatly spaced out at 20 metres apart, and the next would appear as regularly as clockwork. The only crowding was on Bunessan Bay, which had two adults and a juvenile from the year before. Significantly, the younger was always in a corner of the bay.

Nor have I seen so many Great Northern Divers, not in the occasional ones or twos I expected, but in threes and fours to the tune of a hundred in each sea loch. They were not yet of breeding age. We had a close view of one catching a fish; instantly a Lesser Black-back spotted it from 400 metres away, took off and tried to land on the diver. The latter submerged, clearly ate the fish underwater, and was under for a good minute, surfacing far away and leaving the gull perplexed.

As to gulls, there were hardly any



Erin-thérèse (www.flickr.com/photos/eebrierley)
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Black-headed, but hundreds of Commons, on shore and wet pasture, and mobbing round any farmer feeding shore cattle or sheep. Rarely were we out of sound of their mewling.

Skylarks were numerous, and even in stern weather we could often hear three singing at once, above damp pastures with invading sedge, or from dry heather moorland. I used to hear Skylarks on the farmland between Bradway and Holmesfield, but they have been occasional at best since 2000. Cuckoos too were singing, whereas those I once heard on the slopes above the Totley Brook have long gone. In favour of the Mull Cuckoos as the large number of hosts in Meadow Pipits and larks.

Ravens were commonplace, down to sea level and round the outskirts of villages, which is the status they had in mediaeval England and, who knows, could be heading back towards. Since Buzzards were also common as to be hardly worth a second glance, and since the two species are generally at odds with each other, there were some notable, long-fought, noisy and very public disputes, where both birds totally ignored any onlookers.

We had a day with an excellent nature guide, who was actually from Yorkshire, but invested a redundancy payment from twenty

years ago in a move and a new start, is booked up and enjoys every day of his working life! He told us that Mull has Europe's highest Golden Eagle density, at 30 pairs in 300 square miles, and has no persecution. Not surprisingly we saw several birds on nearly every day.

The guide found us a female White-tailed Eagle sitting atop a conifer, where she surveyed the loch for an hour without flying. The loch's waters and shore were well stocked with Greylags, and these were major prey items, but of such a size that few hunting forays were needed. She sported a huge yellow shoulder tag, which made her easy to spot among conifer greens.

Another female was on her nest on a site protected by the landowner. This pair had limited building skills. In one recent year, the nest-base was so thin that the two chicks fell out, in another it tilted to an angle of 45 degrees and the landowner climbed up and wired it back to stability.

There are ten pairs of sea eagle on Mull. Our best view was of one flying and wheeling along, over and round a series of huge cliffs, stepped and slabbed by basalt flows from 65 million years ago. Even against this backdrop, and two kilometres away, it was so clearly the biggest British bird I had ever

seen. As it turned, the white tail reflected the sun. Despite the size disparity, the Golden Eagle wins any disputes, and having a far more aggressive temperament, often engineers such fallouts!

Nevertheless, the best highlight for me was to see a tiny wader, on a sea-wall, as we drove towards it, bobbing in the rain. It let us watch it from a distance of five metres for some time: a Little Stint, most unexpected.

On the mammal front, we hoped to see Otters, and did, two threesomes of mother and two well grown young. Any surprises? I had imagined that all our scouting skills would be needed to spot one, and that any Otter suspicion of our presence would cause panic and flight. Not so! They romped and played with great confidence for a long time, and must have known we and lots of watchers were there.

Secondly, they caught food with such ease, every dive producing a fish or a crab. A nearby Heron followed them around, hoping for a few scraps to be left or to catch fleeing prey.

Have you been to Mull? No? Then go!

Apologies to John for a mis-spelling of his surname getting through the proof-reading stage last issue - PM.

Local Birding with David Woodriff

David Woodriff continues his birding diary from his usual haunts.

On the 5th April, Langsett Woods held up to 8 Crossbills. I encounter this species regularly here and obtain great views at times. The key is to learn their distinctive call, most often heard whilst flying over, but also given infrequently whilst feeding quietly in the treetops. A flushed Woodcock was a bonus and Greenfinch gave their fluttering display flights nearby. Langsett Res also held a calling male Wigeon.

The 6th April just had a magical feel to it. In the early morning I took up a position on the hillside over-looking Ulley Res. This vantage point allowed me to look down on flypast Little Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher, Sand Martin and Swallow. Most surprising was a Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker that broke cover from scattered bushes to fly towards more mature trees on banking nearby. A pair of Buzzards seems to be frequenting one of the groups of woods nearby on a regular basis.

Catcliffe Flash held 7 pairs of Gadwall plus pairs of Tufted Duck, Pochard, Goosander and Shoveler. Yet more Gadwall, Tufted Ducks and Goosander were on Orgreave Lagoons nearby plus 2 male Wigeon, Goldeneye, a Ringed Plover and 3 Oystercatcher. Plenty of Sand Martins were feeding and 5 Lesser Black Backed Gulls were resting. On the River Rother, a pair of Grey Wagtail were calling a female Teal was nervous before taking flight.

On the 7th April I watched in awe at 3 Sparrowhawks displaying over Langsett Woods. Based on size they looked like 2 males and a female. I would assume that both males were vying for the females attention and undertook high climbs before staggered descending stoops like riding a roller coaster. A pair of Kestrel also chased over the woods and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker gave its call nearby.

On Wharnccliffe Chase on the 8th April I was surprised to find an early Tree Pipit singing from a favoured tree at the northern end of Wharnccliffe Chase. Contrastingly, my last 2 Fieldfares of the "Winter" were seen.

A beautiful group of 22 Lesser Redpoll landed in a bush close to my spot over-looking Midhope Res on the 9th April. I scanned through them hoping to see if there were any of their rarer cousins but to no avail. 8 Snipe were in the area with several displaying at a time and a Raven flew east to west (and then back again)

across the moors. 4 Willow Warblers were singing.

One of my favourite summer migrants appeared on Wharnccliffe Chase on the 10th April when a fine male Redstart flew out of trees and across farmland chasing another duller bird which could possibly have been a female. A Swallow sat on wires alongside farm buildings where they breed and both Lapwing and Snipe were showing signs of holding territory.

I undertook a full-count of birds in Hall Wood, High Green on the 11th April. My first male Blackcap of the year was singing plus Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Tawny Owl called. A group of 8 Crossbill flew over and 6 Treecreepers were around.

By the 16th April, Willow Warbler numbers had increased to 9 at Midhope. I love their tumbling warbler call, so symptomatic of spring woodland. A Raven and a group of Crossbill were seen again and 7 Snipe were displaying at times. 2 pairs of Little Grebe were on Midhope Res along with 5 Teal (3m, 2f).

Later the same day I obtained great views of 24 Crossbills feeding in the treetops in Langsett Woods. An early Hobby dashed across a clearing overhead following a Starling sized bird but aborted and disappeared from view - its distinctive Swift-like profile stood out in blue skies.

An influx of Swallows had taken place over the last few days when c100 were at Catcliffe Flash on the 19th April. Several were resting on branches protruding from the water. Nearby, Ulley Res held my first Common Sandpiper of the year with a pair feeding quietly at the waters edge. Further scanning along the shoreline also paid dividend with a Dunlin sited showing its distinctive black belly.

Another Common Sandpiper was at Langsett Res on the 21st April along with displaying Sparrowhawk and a cluster of 8 Song Thrushes. Later the same day a Brambling briefly landed in tree tops at Hall Wood, gave its peculiar call, and then dashed away.

A full-count of birds at the southern end of Wharnccliffe Chase on the 23rd April yielded 3 singing Tree Pipits, 5 male Wheatears and 28 Linnets. 2 male Redstarts sang and a Snipe sat on a fence post on nearby farmland. Cuckoos had been reported elsewhere in the SBSG area but none were here yet in this favoured location? I watched a Coal Tit nest building in a tree stump in the woods alongside and chased down an

unfamiliar call which turned out to be a Nuthatch.

I finished off the full-count the following day by covering the northern half of the Chase. Another 4-5 Tree Pipits were singing and the first Cuckoo had now arrived. I counted 36 Willow Warblers singing on a 300 metre stretch of Wharnccliffe Woods. In theory, there must be something like 5-10x this number in the area at least based on the range of equivalent habitat in the region.

Langsett Woods on the 30th April gave me my first singing Garden Warbler of the summer plus a Jay seemed to be paying close attention to a group of Goldcrest. Another Cuckoo had arrived in the vicinity and 3 Buzzards were calling to each other. 3 pairs of Common Sandpiper were on the shores of the res and Sparrowhawks were still displaying.

Between 6 and 8 Common Sandpipers were at Langsett Res on the 6th May giving there low flying display flights and calls over the water. A pair of Canada Geese were shepherding their chicks and 6 Crossbills were seen. A male Ring Ouzel fed on farmland at White Lee Moor and a female Wheatear was at nearby Peat Pits.

2 Common Whitethroat sang at the NE arm of Ulley Res on the 12th May and a Buzzard was again seen in the same area of woodland. 6 Yellowhammers suggest a decent local population and certain breeding activity. Later the same day, I spotted 3 Lapwing chicks on farmland alongside Wharnccliffe Chase and the Snipe was still perched on sentry duty giving positive vibes for breeding success for this species also.

A pair of Mistle Thrushes were feeding 3 fledged juveniles at Langsett on the 13th May and young Starlings were also on view. Linnets were collecting nesting material and 1 to 2 Cuckoos called. Later in the afternoon I saw my "Bird of the Year" (to date) when a Short-eared Owl flew north over Langsett Moor. It's languid, long winged flappy flight propelled it out of view all too soon.

I checked on the Lapwing chicks at Wharnccliffe Chase on the 16th May. I could only spy two but the other could easily have been hidden in long grass. 14 Tree Pipits were now singing and Linnets were very prominent with c30 around. Both Green Woodpecker and Cuckoo called. pickings before returning to the brook site.

RECENT SIGHTINGS

1st April - 30th May 2010

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

Black-necked Grebe - One was showing well at Silverwood Lagoon on 25th May.

Little Egret - A single bird was seen at Rother Valley CP on 2nd, 5th and 6th of April. A pair flew over Orgreave Lakes, towards RVCP, on 13th May.

Whooper Swan - The last of the winter were 2 at Thrybergh CP on 12th April.

Wigeon - A male was at Langsett Reservoir on 20th April.

Goldeneye - Last of the winter were 16 reported at RVCP on 12th April.

Red Kite - Single birds were seen over Crosspool on 2nd April; Thrybergh CP on 16th April; Ewden Valley on 18th April; Pebley on 27th April; Stanage Edge on 28th April and 15th May; Silverwood on 15th May; Nether Edge on 28th May.

Marsh Harrier - A female flew NW at Ulley CP on 25th April. A presumed subadult male was over Margery Hill on 7th May, and an adult female was present at Carr Vale for most of the morning on 12th May.

Montagu's Harrier - An adult male ranged widely across the area's northwest moorland between



This male Montagu's Harrier delighted some observers - and thwarted others - as it roamed the northwest moors from late April to late May.

30th April and at least 24th May, showing well at times but remaining elusive to many.

Osprey - Passage birds were seen over Strines (2nd April), Redmires (4th April), Ewden, Broomhead and Midhope (5th April), Poolsbrook (5th April), Woodhouse (20th April), RVCP (3rd May), and Harlethorpe Dam (7th May). One was observed leaving roost at Rivelin Dams before heading NW on 18th May.

Quail - one calling at Silverwood Lagoon on 26th May.

Dotterel - Seven were reported from Abney Moor on 11th May. Two birds lingered until taking flight on 18th.

Golden Plover - Highest counts in the area were 350 at Barlborough on 1st April, 500 at Langsett on 7th April, 185 at Ughill on 18th April, and 600 at Peat Pits on 22nd April.

Sanderling - One was present at Orgreave Lakes on 13th, 15th and 24th May, and two present there on 25th. Singles were at Middleton Moor and Redmires Res on 30th May.

Dunlin - 13 were at Middleton Moor and 10 at Orgreave Lakes on 25th April.

Bar-tailed Godwit - Singles were at Carr Vale NR (28th April) and Orgreave Lakes (12th May).

Whimbrel - One was at Barbrook Pools on 25th April.

Greenshank - A single was briefly seen at Silverwood Lagoon on the morning of 21st April.

Little Gull - An adult in summer plumage was at Orgreave Lakes on 12th May.



This Black-necked Grebe was showing off its summer plumage at Silverwood Lagoon on 25th May.

Oystercatcher - Largest counts were 7 at Orgreave Lakes on 15th May, and 8 at Redmires Res on 16th May.

Avocet - One present at Orgreave Lakes on 6th May.

Ringed Plover - 7 were at Orgreave Lakes on 25th April. 6 were at Middleton Moor on 16th and 19th May.

Common Tern - First of the year was at Thrybergh CP on 22nd April.

Arctic Tern - 6 were at Thrybergh CP on 18th April, and 12 at Orgreave Lakes on 6th May. 2 were seen at RVCP and Orgreave Lakes on 7th May; 8 were at RVCP on 8th May; and 4 were at Thrybergh CP on 10th May.

Little Auk - a headless and rather desiccated corpse was found at Damflask Reservoir on 8th May, and had presumably been dead for several weeks.

Turtle Dove - 1 was at RVCP on 3rd May.

Nightjar - First returning bird was a churring bird on the moorland fringe on 21st May.

Swift - First of the year was a single over New Whittington on 19th April. Large counts include 200 at Orgreave Tip on 30th April, 100 at Catcliffe Flash on 4th May, and 400 at Orgreave Lakes on 6th May.

Red-rumped Swallow - A single bird was found among the



This red-rumped swallow was one of the stars of the spring, after being picked up by chance while the observer was photographing Rother Valley's hirundine roost on 3rd May. It stayed at RVCP until the 14th.

roosting hirundines at RVCP's main lake on 3rd May. It remained at the site and was seen daily until 14th May,

Tree Pipit - The year's first was a singing male at Wharncliffe Chase on 8th April.

Yellow Wagtail - Singles at Barbrook Pools and Thrybergh CP

on 9th April were the first returning birds. 13 were at Orgreave on 19th April, with 22 birds N at Orgreave Lakes on 16th May.

Pied/White Wagtail - White Wagtails in the area include 2 at RVCP on 5th April; 2 at Orgreave Lakes on 16th May; 1 at Thrybergh CP on 10th April; 3 at Orgreave on 12th April; 4 at Middleton Moor on 18th April; 4 at Orgreave Lakes on 18th April; 1 at Carr Vale on 28th April.

Black Redstart - A female/immature was at Orgreave Tip on 12th May.

Redstart - First returning bird was a singing male at Agden Rocher on 10th April. 4 singing males were at Padley on 21st April, 3 males and 2 females at Little Barbrook Plantation on 25th April, 4 birds at Edlae on 30th April, and 4 at Miller's Dale on 5th May.

Whinchat - First of the year was a single bird at Cutthroat Bridge on 22nd April. 3 males and 2 females were observed at White Edge on 21st May.

Fieldfare - A single at Upper Thornseat on 1st May was the last of the winter.

Redwing - 4 by the River Loxley at Stacey Bank on 16th April were the



Up to seven Dotterel were present at Abney Moor in May, with two lingering for a week until the 18th.

last of the winter.

Grasshopper Warbler - First of the year was a reeling male at Thrybergh CP on 16th April.

Sedge Warbler - A singing male at Treeton Dyke on 20th April was the first of the year.

Reed Warbler - Two singing males near the Chinese Bridge at Pit-house West were the first records of the year,

Lesser Whitethroat - 1 singing at Canklow on 16th April was the first returning bird.

Whitethroat - 1 at Kilnhurst Ings on 15th April was the first of the year.

Garden Warbler - First of the year was a singing male at Kilnhurst Ings on 27th April.

Wood Warbler - Three singing males at Blacka Plantation on 29th April were the year's first records.

Firecrest - A singing male was



This Ring Ouzel was at Stanage Edge on 13th May

holding territory in North Derbyshire on 9th May.

Spotted Flycatcher - The first record was one at Little Barbrook Plantation on 13th May.

Pied Flycatcher - One at Padley

Gorge on 4th April was the first of the year.

Brambling - A late record of one at Hall Wood in High Green on 21st April was the last of the winter.

Crossbill - Records from a number of sites, including 2 at Stanage Edge (9th April), 8 at Hall Wood, High Green (11th April), 12 at Wharcliffe Heath (12th April), 10 at Broomhead (15th April), 1 at Wyming Brook (25th April), 1 at Longshaw (5th May) and 12 at Redmires (15th May). Family parties were seen at Upper Derwentdale (30 on 16th May), Langsett Wood (maximum of 27 on 16th April) and Midhope Res (maximum of 10 on 21st May).

Pete Mella



This female Pied Flycatcher was at Padley Gorge on 16th May.

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

CD Abell, MG Archer, S Ashton, B Bailey, SJ Barnes, MA Beevers, AR Bell, RP Blagden, K Bower, SJ Branch, MC Brew, PL Brown, R Butterfield, DM Bye, J Crooks, R Dale, A Deighton, M Dyson, G Featherstone, MG Fenner, D Gains, P Garrity, V Gibson, D Gosney, KR Gould, R Greasley, S Guymer, R Harris, A Hill, RD Hill, H Hipperson, M Hodgson, J Hornbuckle, C Hurst, G James, Alan Johnson, Anne Johnson, KE Kenward, J Kingsland, K Knowles, P Leonard, JL Marriott, CR McKay, C Measures, P Mella, TH Minskip, S Mitchie, J Mowbray, MG Oxlade, D Parkes, PH Pearsall, NR Porter, MN Reeder, J Sherwin, M Sherwin, MA Shethurst, AHV Smith, B Spencer, D Stables, CB Stride, SG Tebbutt, A Thompson, M Timms, R Twigg, SE Vickers, RV Walker, D Warburton, JC Wasse, R Watkinson, RDR Williams, D Wood, M Wood-Bonelli, D Woodriff, Rotherham & District Ornithological Society, BTO Birdtrack.

Indoor meeting survey

In order to gain some views and opinions on the future of our indoor meetings, please could you spare a few minutes to complete the following survey?

The easiest and quickest way to do so would be to complete the survey online. It is linked from the website's front page, or you can go direct to the survey at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/GBR7823>. For those without the facilities to do this, please fill in the form below, and send it to Richard Hill, 22 Ansell Road, Sheffield, S11 7PE.

Are you an SBSG member? Yes No

How often do you attend indoor SBSG meetings?

Regularly (8-10 times a year)

Often (5-7 times a year)

Occasionally (1-4 times a year)

Never

What is your main reason for not attending a particular indoor meeting?

Work/family commitments

Location - distance of University Arts Tower from home

Subject matter/choice of speaker

Other

Please state _____

Please rank the following subjects you would like to see at SBSG indoor meetings in order of preference (1 = most like to see, 10 = least like to see).

Local birds

Rare & scarce birds

National birds

Single species / group of species studies

European & International birds

Bird identification

Travel monologues

Conservation

Rare & scarce birds

Other natural history subjects (e.g. Mammals/invertebrates)

Is there anything else the SBSG Committee could do to interest you more in attending meetings?

