

Sheffield Bird Study Group

BULLETIN



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Bulletin

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Mrs Betty Ailsa Moore 1922-2011

Members will have been saddened to hear in both the local and national news about Betty's tragic death. She died suddenly whilst walking/birding around Agden Reservoir on Tuesday, 3rd May. Betty tripped, fell and died on the lower rocks before entering the water. Her friend Vonny Stokes, who was walking with her, jumped into the water to try to save her. She was unable to get out of the reservoir and had to endure some passage of time before help arrived. She was taken to hospital suffering from hypothermia. Our heart goes out both to Vonny for trying to save Betty and to Betty herself who died so tragically and unnecessarily.

Betty was my first bird watching companion 45 years ago and we spent many happy hours going out on local and trips further

afield. She drove her series of mainly blue Triumph Heralds with great aplomb! Sadly she never had an open top version despite my attempts to persuade her otherwise!!!

Much more importantly however, Betty will be remembered for three things which put Sheffield on the ornithological map. She and Marcus organised the annual RSPB Filmshows at the City Hall which were hugely popular during the late 60's and 70's. She was also involved with the protection of a pair of Goshawks in the Derwent Valley from 1973 onwards at a time when few knew they were even any in the UK!

So secret was it that Betty was told protection could not be done successfully and we could not even name them so we called them 'Budgies', a name coined I

believe by Vonny's husband, Kit Stokes. The third and perhaps most important event, however, was the foundation of the Sheffield Bird Study Group by particularly Betty, her husband Marcus and others. Marcus died in 2009. If I am allowed I will review Betty and Marcus' lives and their considerable contribution to the development of Sheffield ornithology at a later date in a Sheffield Bird Report.

In the meantime we shall remember Betty with great affection. She was still driving, walking and climbing mountains, fit and healthy at 88 - and still birding avidly! They don't make them like that very often. Our sympathy goes to Maureen her daughter and Peter her son-in-law and their daughter Christina, also to son David and his family

Dave Herringshaw

Avocets breed at Old Moor

Avocets have bred for the first time at the RSPB's Old Moor reserve, just outside our recording area near Wombwell.

Three pairs arrived at the reserve on 25th April, with the first chick hatching in late May.

Government "Red Tape Challenge"

This wide-ranging initiative, which includes a great deal of environmental regulation, has caused widespread concern. The stated purpose is "to promote open discussion of ways in which the aims of existing regulation can be fulfilled in the least burdensome way possible". Visit <http://tinyurl.com/6d2mc4n> to add your comments and suggestions to the initiative, and/or <http://tinyurl.com/653rg98> to sign the 38 degrees petition against any scrapping of such regulations.

New Bulletin dates

As the group have replaced the June indoor meeting with an evening field meeting, it has been decided that from next "term" it would make more sense for the Bulletin to move months, in order to aid distribution.

From the next issue, the Bulletin will be distributed at the September, November, January, March and May meetings, instead of the previous

October, December, February, April and June issues.

As there will not be an indoor meeting before the next Bulletin in September, members wanting to contribute should do so over the summer.



This Red-necked Phalarope (far right) was one of the star species of the spring, at Middleton Moor on 24th May. See pages 9-12 for more recent sightings.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Indoor Meetings

Tim Melling - What's In A Name?

Wed 14th September 2011, Sheffield University Arts Tower, Lecture Theatre 5, 7.15pm

Dr Tim Melling is an RSPB conservation officer, former member of the BOU records committee, and tour leader, who is well known for sharing his extensive knowledge of the natural world in an amusing and irreverent style. This lecture, which takes a look at the sometimes obscure origins of wildlife names, looks set to be a memorable and entertaining evening.

Field Meetings

Vis Mig at Redmires (October)

Winter Wildfowl at RVCP (December)



Our next field meetings scheduled are the annual events above - more details should appear in the next Bulletin, and on the SBSG website.

Please note: The July trip to Wharnccliffe Heath will now no longer be going ahead.

OTHER DATES TO NOTE

3rd July - Guided Walk To Gypsy Marsh. RSPB walk from Old Moor to Gypsy Marsh. 10am-12pm and 1pm-3pm. £3 for RSPB members, £5 non-members.

6th July - Optics Demo, RSPB Old Moor. 10am-4pm.

7th July - Moths and Moons at Greno Wood (SWT). Meet at Forestry Commission car park on Woodhead Road, SK325949. Take warm clothes, a torch and insect repellent. To book call Hannah Wittram on 0114 234335.

14th July - Mysterious Moths at Blacka Moor (SWT). 9pm-11pm, from Stony Ridge car park SK277806. Suggested minimum donation £3, bring warm clothes, a torch and insect repellent.

20th July - Optics Demo, RSPB Old Moor. 10am-4pm.

3rd August - Optics Demo, RSPB Old Moor. 10am-4pm.

17th August - Optics Demo, RSPB Old Moor. 10am-4pm.

1st Sept - RSPB Sheffield Group Indoor Meeting. Derek Bateson will be talking on "The Gems of Potteric Carr".

6th Sept - Guided Bat Walk, RSPB Old Moor. 7.30pm-late, £3 for RSPB members, £5 for non-members. Booking essential, 01126 751593 or old.moor@rspb.org.uk.

If you have an event to publicise which may interest SBSG members, please email peterjmella@googlemail.com

Deadline for next Bulletin

The next Bulletin will be issued at the September Indoor Meeting. Please note that any items for inclusion in the Bulletin must be received by Pete Mella at peterjmella@googlemail.com (for preference), or 21 Lump Lane, Grenoside, Sheffield, S35 8PL, by **Saturday 28th August**.

Bulletin by email

More and more members have agreed to receive their Bulletins by email, and now **well over half** of you are on our email list, meaning we have been able to cut our print run considerably, and make big savings on postage. Many thanks to all members who have agreed to this, and if you would like to switch over to receiving your Bulletin in pdf format then please email me at peterjmella@googlemail.com.

LECTURE REPORT

Keith Clarkson - Life on the Edge

The lecture at the April meeting was given by Keith Clarkson. Keith has worked for the RSPB at Bempton for some three years, and he spoke of the changing fortunes of the seabirds that breed there.

The huge expanse of sea cliffs at Bempton and Flamborough has always provided breeding sites for many thousands of seabirds, but man has, both directly and indirectly, had a significant effect on their numbers. Around 1860 some 100,000 birds were dying each year, as adults were shot and young left to starve. The Kittiwake was a major victim, as its feathers were valued by the millinery trade, although much of the killing was indiscriminate, with a record of some 6,000 birds shot by one boat-load of fowlers.

This slaughter began to take its toll on numbers, leading a local church minister, the Reverend Laurence Barnes, to step forward and lobby MPs and others in an effort to protect the birds. This led in 1864 to The Protection of Seabirds Act. Local folk had long supplemented their diet and income by taking eggs during the breeding season, but this fairly limited practice, performed by the 'climbers,' probably had little effect on overall numbers.

Demand for eggs began to grow however; they were used in the tanning industry, whilst Guillemot eggs in particular became a delicacy in top restaurants, and by 1900 there were real concerns about this practice on bird numbers. There was some recovery during the First World War, aided latterly by changing social attitudes, but it was not until the 1954 Protection of Birds Act that full legal protection was granted. In recent years the importance of the site has been fully recognised and it now enjoys the highest level of recognition and protection under European legislation.

Keith then went on to describe the work he has initiated. The cliffs were photographed in an attempt to answer the fundamental question of how many birds were present, but subsequent counting proved impossible due to the effects of angle, light and shade. Next, 179 plots were defined, sometimes

based on minute features on the cliff face. Counting is performed in June when young are in the nest, and takes some 48 hours to complete.

Defined plots, visible from points on the cliff top, are also watched and counted. Attempts have also been made to identify the fish species taken by Guillemots. The observer has a second or so, at best, to identify the fish before it is fed to the young bird.

Keith then went on to outline the present situation. Herring Gull numbers have fallen by 60% on the reserve over the last 45 years and the species is now Red-Listed. Fulmar increased over many years to a peak of 1252 pairs in 2000 but was down to 878 pairs when last counted. The practice of discarding unwanted fish and fish waste at sea probably helped numbers of these and other species to increase in the past, as the birds followed the boats, and the great reduction in the North Sea fishing fleet is a likely factor in the fall in numbers.

The practice of discarding may itself be banned in the near future. Kittiwake numbers have also fallen from over 80,000 pairs in the 1980s to around 37-38,000 pairs in recent years, although breeding productivity, apart from two very poor years in 2003-04, remains good. Both Kittiwake and Puffin feed close to the surface and are sensitive to fluctuations in numbers of sandeel, their main food item. Sandeel have been caught on an industrial scale for use in Scandinavia as a biomass fuel and as food for farmed fish.

This has had a significant effect on numbers, whilst the sandeel itself is threatened by the 70% fall in concentration of North Sea plankton since the 1960s as a result of global warming. Coldwater plankton has now effectively disappeared, moving north as temperatures have risen, to be replaced by warm water species from the Bay of Biscay. These species maintain a constant biomass in contrast to the lost coldwater forms whose huge spring blooming fed through into increased sandeel numbers. Interestingly, recent cold winters have seen something of a reversal of this trend, with more

sandeel and more birds. Guillemot feed at deeper levels, with sprat as the major component of their diet, and are thus less susceptible to these changes. They now number over 59,000 birds at the site. Razorbills are also less susceptible to changes in the sandeel population. However, large numbers were found to be caught locally in nets set to catch migrating salmon and sea trout, with up to 100 being found in one net. Changes in fishing practice have now greatly reduced this loss. Gannet numbers have risen enormously from around 10 pairs in the 1970s to some 8,000 pairs now. The species has maintained a remarkable rate of productivity over this time of about 0.8 chicks per pair per year and is now running out of nest sites.

Finally, Keith looked at the challenges of the future. The RSPB is now lobbying intensively for marine protected areas and the concept of sustainable fisheries holds out hope. On the other hand global warming remains a huge issue, and we currently have little or no idea of the effects on our seabirds of the development of offshore renewable energy installations. Siemens has recently won a contract to install 10,000 wind turbines on Dogger and Hornsea Banks, where sandeel breed and Kittiwake fish. Keith has done some work, using Kittiwakes tagged with GPS devices, to precisely determine feeding practices. Gannets have also been tagged with satellite-tracking devices to determine where they feed – they are known, from Dutch studies, to avoid wind farms. These studies have provided some remarkable data so far, including the fact that Gannets average 158km per feeding trip.

Keith's lectures are always a joy, and this one was no exception. His energy and enthusiasm shone through, as did his masterly grasp of his subject. He was warmly welcomed and warmly thanked for an outstanding presentation.

Rod Hinchliffe

Pete Brown is also thanked for his talk in May on San Diego and the Sea of Cortez, that was much enjoyed by members. Sadly our regular lecture scribes could not be in attendance! - PM

FIELD TRIP REPORT - Orgreave Lakes, May 2011

The morning of 1st May had been chosen as the date for a local 'spring migrants' field trip, with Orgreave Lakes the destination, this site having rapidly gained an excellent track record since it was opened to public access some two years ago. The weather was kind in being sunny, dry and fairly warm, although the clear overnight skies and high pressure that had dominated the weather for the preceding days did not raise hopes of an inland fall of migrants.

A group of 10, led by patchworker Mark Reeder, left from opposite the Treeton Cricket Club on Washfield Lane and headed to the bridge over the railway line, where a Whitethroat sang and displayed obligingly from the willow and hawthorn scrub, with Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler also in song. The short distance to the bridge over the River Rother provided further singing warblers and Reed Bunting, while a pair of Grey Wagtails around the weir were evidence of the improved water quality in the river, which had hosted a scarce lowland Dipper a couple of weeks earlier.

A scan of the main lake revealed Mute Swan, Gadwall, Tufted Duck, Mallard and Coot, as well as Canada Goose and Greylag Goose feeding on the grassy banks. Of greater interest were some medium-sized waders picked up on the far side of the lake, identified – with the help of a telescope – as 2 summer-plumaged Grey Plover and a Whimbrel. All three birds gave good views as we walked around the lake, with Grey Plover a local rarity, averaging around one record a year over the last decade, proving to be a site first and a Sheffield tick for most of those present. The lakes have gained a reputation as *the* site for waders locally, with 20 species recorded this spring, and further evidence of its ability to pull them in came in the shape of single Redshank and Ringed Plover, a vocal pair of Oystercatchers and 5 Little Ringed Plovers, several of which were displaying over the rough ground earmarked for the

construction of 4,000 houses, where several pairs of Lapwing were also engaged in territorial flights.

Scanning the area from the observation pole to the East of the main lake provided many of us with the first Swifts of the year, and the presence of small numbers of House Martin, Sand Martin and Swallow ensured a 'full house' on this front, although the Hobby that has been seen at the site on several dates was not tempted by the variety on offer. In keeping with what appears to be a fairly good spring for the species, a Cuckoo was heard calling from the direction of Treeton Wood, having been scarce on the lowlands in recent years, and a Green Woodpecker was also heard 'yaffling' from a similar direction. There was no sign of the Yellow Wagtails that have moved through the site with regularity, but 3 Wheatear showed well on the short grass by the track that runs round the lakes, with good numbers of singing Skylark and Meadow Pipit also much in evidence.

Other resident species seen included Cormorant, Grey Heron, Pied Wagtail (not the 'alba' variety, or White Wagtail, that has been recorded in good numbers here), Stock Dove, Woodpigeon, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel, while Black-headed Gull, Common Gull and Goosander were a reminder of visitors more associated with the winter months. The resident Brown Hares were also much in evidence, passing in close proximity on several occasions: it is to be hoped that the illegal coursing activities of a small number of Greyhound owners have been discouraged following police presence on site when alerted to the problem.

Dog walkers who allow – or encourage – their dogs to follow the shoreline and/ or enter the water



represent the other main problem at the site, and this was apparently responsible for flushing the Grey Plover later in the morning, as well as destroying the nest of a pair of Mute Swans.

Crossing the bridge over the river as we headed back to our vehicles, a lament at not seeing a Kingfisher had the desired effect as one flew from downstream, over the bridge and flashed on upstream in a typically fleeting view. With over 50 species seen (and a few more heard) in the space of two hours, Orgreave Lakes had lived up to its growing reputation and provided an excellent account of itself as a site for spring migrants, with the Grey Plover the undoubted highlight.

Our visit benefited greatly from Mark's experience of the site and its birds, and all present were grateful to him for leading the trip and sharing his local knowledge so generously. News from the site is reported on an almost daily basis to the recent sightings page of the Group's website, allowing people to keep abreast of what's about at one of our top sites, but if you want to find out more about the proposed future development of the site, have a look at the following websites: www.waverleycommunity.org.uk/news/rotherham-organisations-views-on-waverley-community-project/ and www.lda-design.co.uk/waverley. Enjoy the birds while you can!

David Wood

The joy of bird behaviour

John Kirkman shares some of his most thrilling birding moments.

Watching birds brings many pleasures, of which four immediately leap into the mind. First, in order into my mind if not importance, is the delight of learning how to recognise more and more birds, but sight, by sound, by other signs, by jizz. Allied to this is the list, the combination of recognition with compilation.

There are so many bird lists, the obvious annual, garden via the BTO Garden Birdwatch, the life, the holiday, the visit to the dentist and so on. The Alexanders, founder members of the BTO who paid subscriptions for 80 years, kept a daily list of all the birds they heard; probably 36,135 lists for the eldest brother. The Independent's correspondent on the environment, Michael McCarthy, has a Fulham Football Stadium List, which includes Cormorant and Peregrine.

Recognition is fine, not proof of sadness or friendless neurosis, and people recognise music, beers, wines, quotations from poetry, trains, planes – all showing a commitment of time and effort.

Secondly, there is the beauty, spirit and vivacity of birds. Wheatears and nuthatches are marvels to look at closely. A Black Guillemot off Inveraray is dapper, sharply defined, white epaulettes, showing red legs as it dives. A female House Sparrow, when viewed from above in the sun, is a marvellous mixture of streaky browns, duns, ochres and off-yellows. Greenfinches catch the sun as they turn, and change from dullness to emerald. And so it goes on.

Thirdly is where you often are when you see birds, and the fact that trees, flowers, the sea or insects are often part of the picture of experience.

Sometimes, the unexpectedness of where you see the birds is part of this locational pleasure, and can bring an uplift of the spirit. Examples are a Kingfisher dashing down the Sheaf at Heeley or Attercliffe instead of the Derwent at Chatsworth, a

Sparrowhawk over the Town Hall, a dozen Mandarin Ducks on the tiny Totley Brook by the Shepley Spitfire, a heron on your suburban hedge or roof ridge, Mallards sitting in a motorway service station, a juvenile Merlin on a neighbour's TV aerial.

Fourthly, for me and, I'm sure many others, observing and noting behaviour is a lasting pleasure, source of interest and object of amateur theorising. Furthermore, this is an interest that can be pursued anywhere; or almost so. In fact, you can find Feral Pigeons, sparrows and Dunnocks inside some of Sheffield's coffee shops! Prisoners watch birds and, psychologically at least, shorten their sentence.

On the north shore of Loch Scridain, Mull, is a well-known Sea Eagle's nest, one the farmer has to help build, for the birds are fairly inept but accept human assistance in strengthening the base or preventing a 45° sideways slip. And there she was again in early April, head visible over the nest rim, but her head was never still as she scanned the horizon and tilted her head to prospect the heavens. There would be no avian predator, and she seems to accept humans. Interest? To relieve boredom? A general theory that animals that study/survey their environment survive better or have a better breeding record than those that do not?

On the south side of the Ross of Mull, another Sea Eagle glides past, near and low. Suddenly a trio of Buzzards appears. Why not two, if Buzzards are territorial birds? They harass the eagle, whose wingspan makes them look small and insignificant. One in particular stoops on the eagle, pulling aside just before any contact. The victim twists, occasionally slips upside-down and presents talons; an impressive sight when the bird is over eight feet across!

For fifteen minutes there is stalemate, before the eagle leaves; certainly not beaten, not even bloody and bruised, but it could not hunt when under attack, so was wasting its time and energy, so decided to find a new hunting ground. The Buzzards ignored it once it had left

their territory, since to have a general campaign against all Mull's eagles would also waste their time and energy. But why the three Buzzards?

Unexpectedness is also a delight, and although the content is part of the pleasure, you are rarely without the unexpectedness. Thus, a trip to Cardiff at the end of March yielded an Osprey prospecting for food in the River Severn south of Worcester. The Bassenthwaite watch-point in early April had three of them. Even the official staff were excited to see a male rise from Derwentwater with a foot-long fish in its talons and fly towards and round the nest, and over Bassenthwaite, without flapping its wings once.

Also of note is the early entry of some species in other areas of the country compared to southwest Sheffield. The Taff Valley from Llandoff to the giant stadium had Chiffchaff a week before Bradway, and even a Willow Warbler before the end of March.

As usual, the Cockermouth Sewage works in Cumbria, 150 miles to the north, had a host of Swallows and House Martins on April 3rd, two weeks before home. On April 8th, every thicket on the Ross of Mull harboured a singing Willow Warbler, well before Sheffield, and in far greater numbers than we ever experience nowadays in the Sheaf headwaters. And there were Swallows, 300 miles north of home.

In contrast, Great Northern Divers had yet to leave for the Arctic; a species I had always thought to be a rarity was there by the dozen. The Black Guillemot is often hard to spot, but there they were, loafing and preening round the ferry jetty to Islay in the company of a completely tame Otter. On the return journey, Oystercatchers lined the fence-posts by the M74 in the heart of the southern uplands, and a Curlew was at the cattery in Totley.

Being retired, instead of being stuck in a geography classroom, certainly allows you get around more, to meet the unexpected and to observe behaviour!

A trip to Lakenheath

David Woodriff leaves his Wharncliffe patch, on a quest for one of Britain's most magical birds - the Golden Oriole.

My work can take me around the country occasionally and, when so, I invariably check to see if there are any decent birding sites in the vicinity. When I had cause to visit the Cambs / Norfolk / Suffolk border region the list of good birding sites was too good to be true.

In terms of UK breeding status, the Golden Oriole is hanging on by its finger (or claw) tips. I recall an old birding friend reporting hearing one sing briefly from the Thundercliffe Grange woodland near Wincobank sometime in the 1980's (if memory serves me correctly?).

RSPB Lakenheath still attracts a few (although dwindling) breeding population and I learned from the internet that two males had returned and were singing. My destination had been decided!

I arrived at the site at around 5.30pm on a glorious spring afternoon. There was a dry, dusty feel to the place as no rain had fallen for a while. The habitat was a mixture of scrub, reedbeds, grazing marshland and small groups of poplar plantations.

Even before reaching the impressive visitor centre, a Grasshopper Warbler could be heard reeling close by and there were numerous Reed and Sedge Warblers busy offering their songs from amongst the reeds. The "Recent sightings" notice had listed over 40 Hobbys recently plus singing Golden Orioles from one of the plantations called Trial Wood.

The poplar plantations were managed for timber for matchstick production and the Orioles find the habitat suitable. Apparently there was a much larger plantation nearby years ago that sustained a healthy population of Orioles each summer, however, after this was harvested, the population plummeted and only isolated pockets still breed in the UK.

It took less than 10 minutes to reach the aforementioned plantation and I commenced with the upwards gaze into the treetops hoping for a flash of yellow and black or at least to hear the song. A Spotted Flycatcher posed on an open branch and a Cuckoo (one of two) gave excellent views as it perched openly surveying the area. But no Golden Orioles.

After half an hour of stood in the same location, I decided to circle the plantation. There was only a handful of birders around and most were doing what I was doing – looking into the treetops. That is apart from 1 guy who told me he'd seen about 20 Golden Orioles in a tree recently (I think he said near The Algarve) so wasn't interested!?!)

A burst of warbled song from the edge of an extensive reedbed called Joist Fen gave me my first Cetti's Warbler – a handy song to learn from a species that is becoming more familiar across the country. A deep, distant bugling call must have been the Common Cranes that are another star species here.

It was now around 7pm and I was all alone on site but it was still glorious! A couple of Little Egrets flitted by and Marsh Harriers patrolled the reedbed tops. Two Hobbies hunted over the marshes alongside the small river giving superb close-up views and another was perched in the plantation which also hold Nightingale. However, neither Nightingale nor Golden Oriole made an appearance.

A pair of drake Garganey fed on a large flash along with Shelduck and several Great Crested Grebes.

By now, the evening was drawing in and I had to call it a day. I was staying in a local hotel and I was already pondering where to go for an early morning session tomorrow – Stone Curlews at Weeting Heath or back for the Orioles? I chose the former and arrived at the hides by 6am.



A birder (from Yorkshire) pointed out two relatively distant Stone Curlews which were difficult to fully appreciate due to heat haze. I told him of my dip yesterday with the Golden Orioles to which he replied he'd heard them singing around this time yesterday. Reinvigorated, I returned to Lakenheath which is only a short drive away with time ticking down before I clocked on for work!

The walk to Trial Wood took even less time and within seconds of arrival I heard the distinctive fluty song of a Golden Oriole. Fantastic and never to be forgotten! I was glued to the treetops and felt certain that I was looking at the very branch where the song was being delivered from but the Oriole didn't want to be seen. It was tantalising stuff.

I'm afraid that the Oriole remained hidden but to be completely honest, although a visual would have been desired, I felt completely satisfied just listening to the short, intermittent song. Some birders told me they'd been numerous times and never heard the song never mind seeing the bird. I felt extremely fortunate and left with a smile on my face and that great inner warmth when you know you've just witnessed something good!

Picture by Sagar N Iyer, used under the Creative Commons Licence - see here www.flickr.com/photos/sagariyer/5543221957/

Local birding

Another page from the birding diary of **David Woodriff**.

Surely March to May must be the best period for birding in the calendar? It's a time when there is overlap between our departing winter visitors and the first summer arrivals, passage and the chance for patch-list additions plus display, territorial disputes and bird song.

On the 23rd March, 100+ Fieldfares and Redwing were on Wharnccliffe Chase and 6 Waxing heading north gave an excellent view of their bullet-like profile in flight. Then later the same morning, a brief stop at Langsett Reservoir gave me 2 Swallows north and a singing Chiffchaff – my first summer migrants of the year.

Nearby Midhope Reservoir proves to be a semi-reliable site for Goldeneye with a male and 2 females their on the 25th March. A group of 30 Linnets on the moorland fringe seemed to be returning birds following the relent of the harsh winter. The Goldeneye count increased to 4 birds on the 29th March along with 5 Goosander. Lapwings were very territorial on the nearby moors and 3 Snipe were displaying in the evening.

I heard my first singing Willow Warbler this year in Hall Wood, High Green on the 1st April with 2 more at Ulley Reservoir on the same date. Chiffchaff numbers had increased sharply here and 3 Willow Tits were a welcome sighting.

On the 4th April, a visit to Blue Man's Bower near Whiston in light rain produced a probable Green Sandpiper feeding in the margins plus Teal and Gadwall. Blackcaps appeared in Hall Wood on the 6th April along with 3 "mewing" Buzzards interacting overhead and Jays giving strange clicking calls which I assumed was associated to pair-bonding etc?

I caught up with my first Wheatears on the 8th April with 2 on Wharnccliffe Chase. I noticed numerous records of this species seen on the SBSG website prior to this date but they were avoiding me? Skylarks were singing again and Stock Doves were undertaking their long circular flights in the area to as part of their courtship behaviour.

Many Sand Martins (c200) were feeding over Orgreave Lakes on the 11th April with 2 House Martins amongst them. Little Ringed Plovers patrolled the waters edge and Goldeneye and Goosander were on the lake itself. I couldn't resist visiting Silverwood Lagoons later the same day to see the Black-Necked Grebe and the large counts of Skylark (c50) and Linnet (c40) were heartening.

On the 13th April I made my first-ever visit to Carr Vale Nature Reserve. A superb Yellow Wagtail was seen plus the resident birders showed me the distant "Wheatear Wall" through their scopes which, true to its name, had 2 Wheatears on it!

A Tree Pipit was singing at the northern end of Wharnccliffe Chase on the 15th April giving its whole hearted "Spreee-Spreee-Spreee" song from a favoured tree. A group of 5 Yellowhammer fed quietly together in a field showing vivid yellow and rustic tones.

The following day (16th April) was a momentous occasion when visiting the southern end of Wharnccliffe Chase. Two Sand Martin flying north represented my 100th species recorded here. In addition to this there were a further 2 Tree Pipits singing plus 2 male Redstarts were establishing territory. The resident (?) pair of Ravens also called whilst flying towards Oughtibridge.

I saw my last Fieldfare of the season on the 18th April – a solitary bird feeding near Langsett Moor. Conversely, my first Cuckoo had arrived at Midhope and a flock of 40 Redpoll gathered to roost. Earlier in the day, a Common Sandpiper fed at Rivelin Dam.

The 22nd April was a red-letter day on Wharnccliffe Chase – so good I re-wrote my field notes for posterity! A Whitethroat sang from a typical scrubby bank area behind Hallfield Head Farm and a Crossbill gave its diagnostic call whilst flying by. Redstarts and Tree Pipits sang and a Cuckoo called and often settled on top of a pylon surveying the area.

Record counts of Wheatear (c18) had arrived and I often had 4 or 5 birds within the same field of view. However, the highlight was a singing Grasshopper Warbler which gave good views as it reeled from a typical rushy area. Possibly another sang also however this species is well-known for its ability to throw its

call.

The record Wheatear count was broken again on the 25th April at Wharnccliffe Chase when the number had increased to 26 birds! A pair of Curlews defended a possible nest site from a group of Crows and I was surprised to witness the song flight of a Golden Plover – the first time I've witnessed this here.

A Lesser Whitethroat sang at the NE arm of Ulley Reservoir on the 26th April and a pair of Common Sandpiper displayed at Midhope Reservoir the following day. A Yellow Wagtail was feeding in fields by Langsett Moor on the 27th April and a possible Whimbrel was by the reservoir. Unfortunately, the shimmer caused by the heat meant I couldn't connect with the head markings even through the telescope.

Wharnccliffe Chase had settled into the familiar breeding status of many species when I visited on the 9th May. 14 Tree Pipit were singing and a strong count of 9 singing male Redstarts was excellent. Numerous Linnets were in the throws of nest building and a Cuckoo called and was seen to be chased by Meadow Pipits, the host species in this area.

I indulged with a visit to RSPB Old Moor on the same day where a pair of Mediterranean Gulls in full summer plumaged foraged amongst the BHG's. It was interesting to hear how distinctive their call stands out amongst the noise of a healthy gull colony.

A male Whinchat stood imperiously on the heather at Midhope Moor on the 10th May and a juvenile male Peregrine swept low across Langsett Moor nearby. My first Spotted Flycatcher of the year had arrived in Langsett Woods the same day – somehow it's non-descript call stands out amongst the warbler and thrushes tuneful songs.

On the 13th April, a positively enormous female Peregrine appeared over Ulley Reservoir and appeared to loosely latch onto a circling group of Lesser Black Backed Gulls drifting NE.

I hope I've presented a strong case for why these spring months are the times to maximise your time in the field. You just never know what is going to turn up!

RECENT SIGHTINGS

1st April - 30th May 2011

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

Black-necked Grebe - One was at Silverwood Lagoon from 6th-11th April, and two at Orgreave Lakes on 10th.

Whooper Swan - Two flew north at Canklow on 12th April, and one was at Ladybower Res on 30th.

Pink-footed Goose - Two "very unwary" birds were on the causeway between the two lakes at Orgreave on 19th April.

Egyptian Goose - One was at Orgreave Lakes on 30th April.

Wigeon - Two were at Orgreave Lakes and one one at Blue Man's Bower on 4th April. A drake was at Middleton Moor on 9th, and Orgreave saw a single on 17th, and four on 24th.

Garganey - A male was at Thrybergh CP on 25th April.

Common Scoter - A pair were at Redmires Res on 15th April.

Goldeneye - Later records included 11 at Orgreave Lakes on 5th April, 17 at the same site on 17th, and one at Rother Valley on 26th.

Goosander - Numbers at Orgreave Lakes during this period peaked at 14 on 17th April, with an adult male and immature female still present on 16th May.

Red Kite - Two were at Big Moor, mobbed by a Buzzard, on 17th April. All other recorded were singles, at Aston on 1st April, Ranmoor on 10th, Ewden Height on 16th, Ulley Res on 26th, Thrybergh CP on 29th, and Hickfield Bank on 8th May.



This Bar-tailed Godwit was one of two present at Orgreave Lakes on the 17th April.

Marsh Harrier - A sub-adult was mobbed by a Peregrine and Raven at Langsett Moor on 7th April.

Rough-legged Buzzard - A Juvenile was recorded at Emlin Ridge on 16th and 17th April.

Osprey - Recorded from Curbar Edge and Windy Corner on 2nd April (the latter saw two separate birds), Agden on 12th, Thrybergh CP on 15th, Lodge Moor on 16th, Agden Rocher on 22nd (seen eating a fish on a telegraph pole at Canyards), Clowne on 23rd, Redmires on 28th, and Barlborough Common on 29th.

Quail - One was flushed from cereal fields at Cutthorpe on 13th April, and another was heard calling at Orgreave Lakes

on 28th May.

Common Crane - One was recorded over Hackenthorpe, heading towards Woodhouse/Orgreave, on 4th May.

Avocet - Two were at Orgreave Lakes on 23rd and 24th April, with three seen over Thrybergh CP on 24th.

Ringed Plover - Numbers at Orgreave peaked at 36 on 24th May, of which at least 28 were of the *tundrae* race.

Dotterel - One was at Abney Moor on 1st May.

Golden Plover - Maxima include 355 at Redmires Conduit on 2nd April, 320 at Peat Pits on 6th, and 151 at Bradfield Moors on 8th, and 160 at Orgreave Lakes on 13th. 30 were on Rod Moor on 1st May.

PL BROWN

Grey Plover - A pair were at Orgreave Lakes on 1st May, eventually disturbed by dog-walkers.

Sanderling - Orgreave saw one on 3rd May, two on 7th, and one on 25th. Two were at Middleton Moor on 18th.

Dunlin - Many reports from across the period, mainly from Orgreave Lakes (peaking at 11 N on 7th May) and Middleton Moor (peaking at nine on 24th May). Other sightings include one at Thrybergh CP on 24th April, two on Redmires on 1st May and one on 2nd, one at Barbrook Pools on 3rd, and two at Alport Moor on 22nd.

Bar-tailed Godwit - Two were at Orgreave Lakes on 17th April, and one at the same site on 7th May.

Whimbrel - Three were at Ulley CP on 1st May, two at Middleton Moor on 14th and 19th, and three at Thrybergh CP on 22nd. Singles were at Orgreave Lakes on 1st, 2nd, 5th, and 6th May.

Redshank - The largest count was 13 at Middleton Moor on 16th April. Four were at Orgreave Lakes on 7th and 14th.

Greenshank - The first of the summer was one at Barbrook Pools on 21st April. At least two were at Orgreave Lakes on 2nd May, with singles at the same site on 1st and 7th, and other single birds at Staveley Works on 1st May and Middleton Moor on 7th.

Green Sandpiper - Records from Centenary Riverside on 4th, 6th, 12th and 21st April, Blue Man's Bower on 5th, Little Barbrook Res (where two were present) on 18th, and Orgreave Lakes on 2nd and 3rd May.

Turnstone - Singles at Orgreave Lakes on 3rd, 4th, 22nd, 23rd, 24th and 25th May.

Red-necked Phalarope - One was at Middleton Moor on 24th



MA Smethurst

This drake Garganey was at Thrybergh CP on 25th April.

Moor, eventually leaving SW with five Dunlin.

Common Tern - The first of the year was one at Thrybergh on 10th April, followed by two at Aston on 11th. Reported from various sites from late April onwards, with the highest count being six at Thrybergh CP on 28th April.

Arctic Tern - One flew NE over Rother Valley CP's Meadowgate Lake on 26th April.

Cuckoo - First of the year was one at Blacka Moor on 10th April, with widespread reports from 15th onwards. The highest count was three at Padley Gorge on 12th May.

Swift - The earliest record was two at Beighton on 23rd April. Larger counts included 450 at Orgreave Lakes on 23rd May, 80 at Effingham Street on 23rd, and 80 at Firsby Res on 24th.

Sand Martin - Highest counts were 550 at Thrybergh CP on 5th April, and 700 at Orgreave Lakes on 7th.

Swallow - Few large counts, with the highest being 25 at Monsal Dale on 12th April, 20 at Orgreave Lakes on 26th, 40 at Rother Valley on 26th, 20 at Grenoside on 9th May and 30 at Firsby Res on 24th.

House Martin - Highest counts 30 at Thrybergh CP on 17th May, and 45 at Firsby Res on 24th.

Tree Pipit - The first reports were two at Barbrook Plantation, and one at Head Stone Bank, on 14th April. The highest count was 14 at Wharncliffe Chase on 9th May.

Rock Pipit - One was at Orgreave Lakes on 1st April.

Yellow Wagtail - First of the year were three males at Orgreave Lakes on 7th April, followed by one on 9th. Two upland records followed, with two at Agden on 9th, and one at Roper Hill on 10th. The highest counts were eight at Orgreave Lakes on 6th May, and six at Ulley on 20th May. Four at Rivelin Valley on 1st May and two at Worrall on 7th were



Andy Deighton

This Osprey was posing nicely with a fish at Canyards on 22nd April.

unusual records.

Pied (White) Wagtail - White *alba* Wagtails were recorded from a number of sites, with maxima of 14 at Orgreave Lakes on 7th April, four at Blue Man's Bower on 20th, and five at Centenary Riverside on 8th May.

Waxwing - Records continued to trickle in during April, mainly in small numbers. The most notable counts were 30 at Ecclesall on 7th, 38 at Dronfield Woodhouse on 7th, 30 at Redmires on 7th, 25 at Sharrow on 8th, 35 at Ecclesall on 9th, and 50 at Sharrow Vale Road on 14th, and 25 at Barlborough on 22nd. The only May records were 20 at Harley on 1st, and one on Psalter Lane on 3rd.

Redstart - The first record of the year was a 2nd year male caught and ringed at Normanton Spring on 7th, followed by birds at Barbrook Plantation, Rocher Wood and Monsal Dale Quarry on 9th. The highest counts were 10 at Edale on 18th, and nine at Wharncliffe Chase on 9th May.

Whinchat - The first was one at

Big Moor on 17th, followed by one at Barbrook Plantation on 18th and two at Orgreave Lakes on 19th. The largest count was three at Burbage Valley on 27th.

Stonechat - Higher counts included five at Burbage Valley on 3rd April, six at Blacka Moor on 23rd, six at Blacka Moor on 28th, and eight at Padley Gorge on 19th May. Breeding was confirmed at a number of sites by the end of May.

Wheatear - "Greenland" birds were recorded at a number of sites, with a maximum of 15 on 16th April at Orgreave Lakes. Other large counts of Wheatear included 11 at Barbrook Pools on 8th April, 11 at Lose Hill on 13th April, ten on Stanage Edge on 14th, 18 at Midhope on 16th, 20 at Orgreave Lakes on 21st, and 26 at Wharncliffe Chase on 25th.

Ring Ouzel - Birds returned to the usual breeding haunts, with a maximum of nine at Stanage Edge on 15th April.

Fieldfare - Larger counts in this period included 100 at

Ladybower on 1st April, 145 at Redmires on 2nd and 120 at Peat Pits on 9th. The final birds were a flock of ten at Peat Pits on 27th.

Redwing - Just three records during this period - one at Sharrow General Cemetery on 1st April, nine at Redmires on 2nd, and one at Hathersage on 3rd.

Grasshopper Warbler - The first was a reeling bird at Redmires on 10th April, the earliest site record by a week. Recorded widely from the 14th onwards, with two birds recorded at Duckmanton on 15th, Redmires on 17th, Gleadless Valley on 18th, Silverwood Lagoon on 23rd, Blacka Moor on 23rd, Handsworth on 26th and Poolsbrook Marsh on 29th.

Sedge Warbler - The first was a singing male at Thrybergh CP on 13th April, followed by another at Poolsbrook Marsh on 14th. The highest count was six at Poolsbrook on 28th.

Reed Warbler - The first was one at Pit-house West on 14th, followed by one at Duckmanton on 15th. The highest count was ten at Bolehill Flash on 19th.

Lesser Whitethroat - The first was one at Thrybergh CP on 14th April, with the main arrivals coming from the 22nd onwards. More unusual locations include Attercliffe Supertram depot on 18th, and Tipton School on 6th May.

Whitethroat - The first were two at Kiveton Community Woodland on 8th April. Some large counts include 10 at Kilnhurst Ings on 15th, 20 at Silverwood Lagoon on 24th, 12 at Thrybergh CP on 26th, 14 at Treeton Dyke on 2nd May, 18 at Firsby Res on 2nd, 16 at Inkersall on 8th, and 16 at Owlthorpe on 11th.

Garden Warbler - The first of the year was one at Rother Valley CP on 19th April, with the highest count being five at Firsby



This handsome Short-eared owl was photographed during a rainstorm on the moorland fringe in April.

Res on 1st May.

Blackcap - The highest counts were 11 at Gleadless Valley on 10th April, 11 at Blackburn Meadows on 14th, 12 at Shirebrook Valley on 29th, and 10 at Kilnhurst lngs on 26th.

Wood Warbler - The earliest record was one at Wyming Brook on 16th April, with the next not until the 22nd, at Wharnccliffe Wood, Ladybower Wood, Upper Derwentdale and Blacka Moor. The highest count was four at Padley Gorge on 12th May.

Chiffchaff - Larger counts included 12 at Ulley CP on 3rd April, 15 at Inkersall on 9th, 14 at Agden on 9th, 13 at Gleadless Valley NR on 10th, 12 at Thrybergh CP on 11th, and 13 at Beauchief on 24th May.

Willow Warbler - The largest counts were, 24 at Redmires on 10th, 26 at Calver on 13th, 25th at Poolsbrook Marsh on 14th, 36 at Redmires on 17th, 40 at Edale on 18th, 22 at Inkersall on 23rd, 23 at Wharnccliffe Heath on 3rd May, 20 at Wyming Brook on 3rd, 21 at Castleton on 3rd, and 38 at Wharnccliffe Wood on 9th.

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

CD Abell, MG Archer, E Ash, S Ashton, D Atkinson, B Bailey, S Bailey, N Barnes, SJ Barnes, AR Bell, AS Bilton, RP Blagden, C Bonnington, K Bower, P Bowker, SJ Branch, PL Brown, R Butterfield, DJ Buttle, DM Bye, EO Chafer, I Chapman, J Clarke, L Coates, B Cole, J Crank, MA Critchlow, J Crooks, A Cutts, R Dale, C Dauris, J Davies, A Deighton, S Draper, J Ducker, S Duckworth, NP Dummigan, G Dyson, M Dyson, H Egan, J Ferguson, D Gains, M Garner, P Garrity, G Grant, S Grant, S Guymer, D Hallam, J Hallam, R Harris, R Hawley, D Heathcote, I Hedge, M Hibbert, A Hicks, A Hill, RD Hill, D Hitchen, A&V Hobson, M Hodgson, J Hornbuckle, J Housden, C Hurst, I Hutchinson, S Jackson, G James, M Jarvis, C Jepson-Brown, Alan Johnson, Anne Johnson, A Jones, KE Kenward, S King, J Kingsland, N Kipling, K Knowles, M Kramer, M Lacey, JM Laskey, P Lawson, CL Leonard, P Leonard, P License, S Linacre, P Lockwood, G Lovett, JL Marriott, M Maxwell, P Mella, B Merryweather, TH Middleton, M Miller, TH Minskip, J Morley, JA Mountford, D Mowbray, D Neill, MG Oxlade, D Parkes, J Partridge, PH Pearsall, R Platts, R Popplewell, NR Porter, D Primrose, MN Reeder, D Roddis, S Samworth, M Sanders, J Sherwin, M Sherwin, S Sherwin, A Siddall, D Simmonite, MA Smethurst, AHV Smith, M Snook, B Spencer, D Stables, CG Stack, J Stobart, J Street, C Stride, G Stride, MJ Sweeney, JM Swift, S Sykes, J Taylor, M&L Taylor, N Taylor, SG Tebbutt, P Thomas, A Thompson, M Timms, A Tomlinson, K Townsend, R Twigg, C Tyler, SE Vickers, EC Vincent, D Warburton, P Wareham, JC Wasse, A Watson, AD Watson, C Wilkinson, G Williams, RDR Williams, P&A Wilson, D Wood, D Woodriff, Rotherham and District Ornithological Society, Sorby-Breck Ringing Group, Thrybergh CP Bird Log, BTO Bird Track.

Spotted Flycatcher - The first was at Wharnccliffe Side on 28th April, with the next at Redmires on 1st May. The largest count was three at Barbrook Plantation on 10th.

Pied Flycatcher - Two at Padley Gorge on 7th April were the first of the year. The same site saw the highest count of the spring, with eight recorded on 28th.

Great Grey Shrike - One was at Dore on 7th and 8th April, and the Agden area on 10th and 11th.

Brambling - A few April records, with the last being one at Redmires on 17th.

Twite - Two were at Bradwell on 3rd May.

Crossbill - Small numbers recorded from Redmires and Wharnccliffe, and six at Dennis Knoll on 9th May.

Corn Bunting - One singing male was at Harthill - just inside the SBSG area - on 7th and 9th May.

Escaped Species - Two ringed Sacred Ibis were feeding in the river by the cricket pitch at Chatsworth Park on 8th May.

Pete Mella