

Born and raised in Rotherham (though of good Sheffield stock) my earliest memories of birds were family day trips to Clumber Park. These often involved sitting in a cramped Hilman Avenger with my 2 siblings. The 3 of us thought mum's interest in birds was boring and rebelled by banging on the car window each time something (probably a Jay) alighted on the scattered crumbs.

Fortunately this dislike of our feathered friends was short lived. When my grandparent's terraced house in Darnall was compulsorily purchased they were re-housed in Stannington and as visits to them often involved walks into the nearby Rivelin Valley my eye for the birds soon opened.

I've always been big on patch birding and my first was the former waste ground adjacent to the long gone Tinsley Park Steels. Yellowhammers became my favourite bird and finding such rarities (to me) as Pied Flycatcher and Jack Snipe were my highlights. Growing up in Brinsworth, just a short bike ride from Catcliffe, I soon moved onto Catcliffe Flash, Treeton Dyke and Bolehill Flash meeting local birders Mike Fenner and Bob Croxton, who thrilled me with tales of good birds.

Catching the twitching bug in 1986, much of my spare time was spent chasing up and down the country in search of ticks. Now on the brink of 500 British species these trips are few and far between – but still as enjoyable.

Moving to Aston in the mid-1990's I began to spend more and more time at the nearby Rother Valley Country Park. Birding there was always competitive, and at times more than a little controversial. That said I was fortunate enough to find a few good birds, including Sheffield's first American Golden Plover and American Wigeon.

By 2008 I had tired of the birding politics of RVCP and began to look for a new patch. Pit-house West occupied me for a while – I could even scope it from the back garden – but with a low diversity of species I needed a bigger fix. It was at this time that I became aware of an area water on the old Orgreave Coking Works site. I had watched this site briefly before opencast work commenced in 1995 and knew it had potential.

Since 2009 I have recorded around 175 species at Orgreave, finding such local rarities as White-fronted Goose, Ring-necked Duck, Long-tailed Duck, Leach's Petrel, Long-tailed Skua, Great White Egret and Glossy Ibis.

Away from Orgreave (and that's not very often) my favourite birding locations are Extremadura, where I have now visited on 4 occasions and my October home of mainland Shetland.

Whilst I enjoy twitching, it is finding and sharing rarities that gives me the biggest thrill. Away from Sheffield I have found, among others, Pectoral Sandpiper, Black-winged Pratincole and Melodious Warbler in Cornwall and Pallas's Warbler, Paddyfield Warbler, Olive-backed Pipit, Little Bunting on Shetland.

Locally, apart from the aforementioned Orgreave birds, my favourite find was the 3 White Storks that flew over my house whilst I was sanding a door on the patio. Most frustrating was a cracking male Red-backed Shrike tantalisingly close to the SBSG area at Langsett!

I first joined the SBSG in 1985 when there most definitely was a certain clique among the group. The Sheffield area had gained a reputation for suppression of rarer birds, a reputation that grew into the early 1990's. Thankfully those days are long gone. Joining the committee in 2013 as a general member I was soon coerced into the position of Conservation Officer. Our local birds are constantly facing threat from development and I hope that by being in this role I can at least help mitigate the

situation to benefit our birds. In addition to my conservation role I will also promote the group via social media and assist with the website.