

HOC NEWS

quarterly bulletin for herefordshire birdwatchers

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2014

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Editorial

by Nicky Davies

Hello - and welcome to the November edition of the HOC newsletter. There is a lot of information in this edition including trip reports, a fascinating feature on Chukars by Mick Colquhoun, encounters with Ray Mears, as well as plenty of club activity news. This edition is crammed with information so if you have sent pictures to me and they're not in, please accept my apologies. I can only put in what the space allows me to add. Hopefully, we will have the gallery back soon and we can post up some of your images.

The club now has 2 splendid pull up banners showing work of the Club and advertising the Atlas. They were on display at Wyevale Garden Centre, Hereford on 29 August and at the latest indoor meeting.

If you are able to help at Castle Green's Fair on Sunday 30 November where we shall be having a club stall 10 - 4pm, please contact Susanna at 07855022018. It promises to be a good winter event, so please consider volunteering.

Please continue to send in your records to the recorders (details in the contacts section) and keep checking the website for more news, sightings and photographs. If you are a Facebook fan, please 'Like' us on our page.

Remember that the closing date for submissions for the next edition of HOC news is 14th January. If you have any queries about submitting information, please contact me on (07855 126642) or email at nickydavies71@hotmail.com

Happy birding

Nicky



Members on the Bridlington holiday enjoying their tea with the ladies of the Flamborough branch of the WI.
Picture by Chris Bartlett

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Birding in Yorkshire. Picture by Una Morgan

Look carefully at the red-legged partridge

by Mick Colquhoun

Last May some observant residents in Fownhope noticed that a confiding bird feeding in their garden did not match the text book description of the red-legged partridge. In particular, they noticed that the characteristic speckled neck plumage of the partridge was absent. They had tentatively identified the bird as chukar or perhaps a rock partridge. I was nearby and had my camera in the car and so was able to record the bird which is shown in the illustration alongside the red-legged partridge.

It was quite clear that this bird was very different to the red-legged partridge with which we are familiar in Herefordshire. Not being an expert on Asian partridges I could not confidently identify the bird, but as I had recordings of the calls of all three I tried the effect on this mystery bird. It was completely unmoved by the call of the rock partridge and red-legged partridge but became quite animated and looked around avidly when I tried the call of the chukar. The call is a noisy *chuck-chuck-chukar-chukar* from which the name is derived.

Chukars are native to Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India and along the inner ranges of the Western Himalayas to Nepal. It is part of a confusing group of 'red-legged partridges' and in the past the chukar group was included with the rock partridge, but is now considered a separate species. Several plumage variations of the chukar have been described and designated as subspecies. It is the national bird of Pakistan.

British sportsmen in India considered the chukar to be good sport because of their fast flight and it has been introduced in some countries as a game bird, and feral populations have become established in the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Hawaii. In practice it was not very successful because it was reluctant to fly and its confiding nature led it to take up residence in gardens away from the shoot. In addition, it was not considered good eating!

Chukars were introduced as game birds in the UK between 1970 and 1992 when the practice was outlawed. Genetic studies showed that the genetic pollution of UK red-legs by Chukars declined rapidly after it became illegal to release either the pure Chukar or hybrids. This was largely due to their poor breeding success; while the initial (F1) cross with red-legged partridges on game farms was very productive, producing many vigorous young, they in their turn (the F2 generation), produced very few young whether paired with hybrids or pure red-legs. This was a potential disaster for the wild red-legged population, of which the UK is now of international importance.

The origin of the Fownhope bird is completely unknown, but almost certainly derives from birds bred for shooting, either a recent release or from persistence of genetic stock from before the ban. The chukar is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, so it is an offence to release or to allow the escape of this species into the wild.

Have a second look at red-legged partridges the next time you see one; any further information about potential Chukars or hybrids should be sent to the county recorder.



Red-legged partridge



Chukar

Both pictures by Mick Colquhoun

Recording the birds of Herefordshire

**An HOC meeting to be held at Bartestree Village Hall, Bartestree, Herefordshire
Sunday 9th November, 2014 14.00 – 17.00**

The recording of the birds that occur in Herefordshire throughout the year is a core activity of HOC. The data helps monitor populations, contributes to conservation measures and provides a valuable historical record for future comparison. This half-day meeting, which is free to attend, describes the methods by which we currently record this information and explores ways to make contributing to the Club's database easier. Ultimately it is hoped to increase the number of records submitted and build up a more comprehensive picture of the birds in the county.

Guest Speaker

Nick Moran (British Trust for Ornithology) "*Bird recording in the 21st century*"

Nick Moran heads the BirdTrack team at BTO and will explain the potential of this package as a national and international means of recording

HOC Speakers

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Chris Robinson</i> | <i>"Herefordshire bird surveys: life after the Atlas"</i> |
| <i>Gerald Wells</i> | <i>"Submission of records: the current options"</i> |
| <i>John Pullen</i> | <i>"Learning from Patch Watching"</i> |
| <i>Mick Colquhoun</i> | <i>"The value of photography in recording"</i> |

Tea and light refreshments will be available.

For further information contact: **Gerald Wells** 01531 640124 geraldwells5@btinternet.com

Notes from the Chair

by Gareth Morgan

A time of mists and mellow fruitfulness. Time to tidy the garden and prepare for the next growing season. Time to read the latest Annual Report. Time to read your own personal copy of "The Birds of Herefordshire", which you purchased at the remarkable pre-publication offer price. Many of us will have a copy of the BTO National Atlas, and you may find it worthwhile to have another look at the sections on tree sparrows, corn bunting and, especially, curlew. Herefordshire is still a home for curlew, and HOC as a whole has an important role in maintaining and, where possible, increasing the breeding population of these superb birds.

Whenever and wherever you go birding within the county, think - what can I do to help the curlew and other species? This is, after all, one of the reasons for the existence of the Club.

During the recent HOC annual few days away, it was noticeable that very few, if any, of the sea watchers were, by Club standards, young. This applied not only to our own group, but also to all other groups we saw. It may be that anyone who can work is working, but can you remember how old you were when you first realised how much pleasure there is in standing on top of a cliff in a strong wind, fighting to hold your binoculars and/or telescope steady, while you struggle to identify a few dots half a mile away, flying a couple of feet above the waves?

Are you doing enough to encourage the youngsters in your own family to join you on your visits to the seaside? Do you promise them a fish supper when they can positively separate a velvet from a common scoter, or distinguish any of the tern variants? The question is - who are the next generation of active, outdoor birders? Your Club depends on them. Enjoy your birding during the Autumn. There's plenty to see and record.



Turnstones taken at Bridlington by Una Morgan

HOC SIGHTING HIGHLIGHTS

July - September 2014

Compiled by Mick Colquhoun

Notable sightings in the three months covered by this report include

Quail heard Eardisley 5/7, **Black tailed godwit** regular at WGP/BGP July and August, **Little ringed plover** regular at WGP/BGP July and August, **Purple heron** report of one near the A465 at Pontrilas 11/7, **Hobby** seen regularly at the gravel pits July / August, **Common scoter** 5 at BGP 23/7, **Common tern** WGP 23/7 and 2/8, **Yellow legged gull** seen sporadically at BGP, WGP and Milton cross 24/8

Greenshank WGP BGP sporadically August and September, **Honey buzzard** report of one at the Lugg bridge Kingsland , **Ruff** WGP 22/8 20/9, **Arctic tern** WGP 25/8 Sandwich tern BGP WGP 25/8, **Whimbrel** WGP 28/8, **Curlew sandpiper** BGP 31/8, **Ring ouzel** 3/9 and 27/9 the Darrens, **Little stint** 6/9 and 20/9 WGP, **Garganey** BGP 6/9 13/9, **Pintail** 11/9 WGP, **Osprey** 12/9 WGP, **Knot** Sporadic reports Sept WGP, **Goshawk** occasional reports, **Lesser Canada goose** Wilton Ross 15/9, **Wryneck** reported Much Birch 17/18 Sept , **Reed warbler** Pencoyd 18/9, **Jack snipe** WGP 27/9

WGP Wellington gravel pits **BGP** Brockhall gravel pits

Observers

Steve Coney, John Tilby, Nick Peglar, Gerry Bilbao, A Eveleigh, John Pullen, Paul Downes, R. Millar, Jim Wilkinson, Brian Wilder, Gerald Parker, Espen Quinto-Ashman, R Hemming, NS Morris, D Burgoyne, I Jones, IB Hart, P Jennings, I Draycott, Mary Wood.

TREASURERS JOTTINGS

2012 Annual Report You should by now have received the latest Annual Report. If you haven't got yours, please let me know.

Newsletter by email This Newsletter has been sent by email to 220 members and by post to 105. We shall continue to issue printed versions, in black & white, for as long as there is a demand. However, if you have an email address but are receiving the printed version, I encourage you consider trying the email edition which shows all the pictures in full colour. Just email me and I will send you a copy.

Jim Wilkinson

WHOOOPER AND BEWICK'S SWANS

In January 2015 Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) are coordinating the UK section of the International Swan Census and the principal aim is to obtain a complete count of all Whooper and Bewick's Swans in the country. The main survey will be carried out as part of the January Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts but as these surveys do not cover all the possible sites where these species may occur we are keen to know if there are any elsewhere. The main census period is during the weekend of **January 17th and 18th**. Neither of these species occurs very regularly in Herefordshire but if you see or know of any Bewick's or Whoopers present in the county anywhere during that weekend **or at any time during January** can you please let me know, make a posting on our website or both! Many thanks.

Chris Robinson (Herefordshire BTO Rep)

Email: herefordbtorep@btinternet

Tel: 01981 510360

www.herefordshirebirds.org

DESERT ISLAND BIRDER

NAME & HOC POSITION

Gerald Parker Outdoor Meetings Secretary

FAVOURITE BIRD AND WHY

The bullfinch is my favourite bird mainly because the plumage is so striking, pink (like a wintery sunset) black, white and grey, all cool colours, clean and distinctive. It is a shy secretive bird with a quiet call, they are around but not always easy to see. They can cause havoc to fruit growers as they have a liking for the buds from fruit trees and bushes. Many farmers used to put call birds in cages to trap their companions when they came to investigate and I have been known to release them, hopefully not a custodial offence!! Yes, any day with a bullfinch in it is a good day.

FAVOURITE BIRDING PATCH IN HEREFORDSHIRE

There are many but it has to be Brockhall Gravel Pit, or Stretton Sugwas Gravel Pit as it was previously known. I have been visiting it since 1970, saw my first little ringed plover there and was occasionally chased out as it was a working site then.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO BIRDWATCHING?

Growing up in the country, I have always been interested in natural history and other countryside pursuits, serious birding arrived when I joined the HOC in 1992, being out with likeminded friends then opened up a whole new horizon.



Gerald with one or two birds!

WHAT DO YOU GET UP TO WHEN NOT WATCHING BIRDS

I have many interests / hobbies which are art, gardening, walking/cycling, DIY, volunteering with the Woodland Trust and of course - being with my family and grandchildren.

ESSENTIAL BIRDING ACCESSORY

My binoculars

EARLIEST BIRDING MEMORIES

My earliest memory is going out on a crisp winters afternoon when I was about 12 with a borrowed pair of opera glasses looking at small birds and marvelling at the detail and colours that I saw through them.

HOC Field Meetings 2014 October - January

Wellington Gravel Pits

November 16th Sunday

Meet at Wellington Gravel Pits at 9.00am (SO 504:484) **morning only**. For a walk around this premier Herefordshire wetland site. Good numbers of wintering waterbirds and there is always a possibility of something special turning up. Moderate walking, waterproof footwear essential, no dogs please.

Leader: Geof Davis (tel 01981 251355)

Chasewater Country Park (WS8 7NL)

November 30th Sunday

Meet at Chasewater Country Park Visitors Centre (SK 039:071) at 10.00am. Travel north on M5 and M6 to A5 (junction 12). Chasewater is accessed from the eastbound carriageway of the A5 at Brownhills. It is signposted from the dual carriageway after the junction with the A452. Journey time from Hereford is approximately 1 hour 45 minutes. Chasewater is a British Waterways canal feeder reservoir of almost 100ha. Set amidst former heath, marsh and bog. Carry lunch no dogs please. Generally easy walking with some medium gradients.

Leaders: Phil and Chris Williams (tel: 01432 350238)

Credenhill Wood and Brockhill GP

December 10th Wednesday

Meet at Credenhill Wood car park (SO 455:440) at 9.30 am. The morning will be a woodland walk with moderate gradients and good views, lunch in cars. The afternoon we will visit Brockhall Gravel Pit where a good cross section of waterfowl will hopefully be found. Stout waterproof footwear and clothing essential, No dogs please.

Leader: Gerald Parker (tel 01432 760023)

Battery Point and Portbury NR

January 10th Saturday.

Meet at Battery Point (ST 465:777) at 10.00am. Directions – Leave the M5 motorway at junction 19, take the A369 NW towards Portishead, at Portishead take the road going north towards Woodhill Bay and Battery Point. This has been a good site for seeing Purple Sandpiper at high tide roost.

Afterwards we will drive the short distance to Portbury Nature Reserve ST 484:766) where lunch will be consumed in cars at 12.30 – 1.00 pm. This will be followed by a walk to various hides with the possibility of many water birds. Reasonably easy walking, no dogs please. **If interested please contact the leader beforehand.**

Leader: Tony Eveleigh (tel 01989 750297)

Hill Farm near Castle Frome

January 24th Saturday

Meet at Hill Farm (SO 674:454) at 9.30am. By kind permission of Mrs L Manning. There are wintering bird seed plots and a wealth of habitat producing a good variety of farmland birds.

Directions: Take the A4103 Hereford to Worcester road, turn right for Ledbury at the foot of Fromes Hill onto the B4214 and take the second left (a sharp turn at the top of the hill) then it is the entrance on the right, signed 'The Hill'. This is a fairly strenuous walk due to the nature of the terrain, lunch to be eaten back at the cars. Afterwards we could re-assemble at Stretton Grandison church (SO 633:441) and visit Homend Park ponds and the wood on Homend bank. No dogs please.

Leader: Brian Willder (tel 01531 670404)

Wellington Gravel Pits and Bodenham Lake

February 15th Sunday

Meet at Wellington Gravel Pits at 9.30am (SO 505:482) for a walk around this premier Herefordshire birding location. All the winter species should be in and there is always the possibility of a rarity! Afterwards we will travel to Bodenham Lake where lunch will be eaten at the cars and then a walk along the lakeside culminating at the hide. Moderate walking gradients and a possibility mud underfoot so please bring waterproof clothing and footwear. No dogs please.

Leader: Gerald Parker (tel 01432 760023)

Treetops, Howle Hill, near Coughton

March 21st Saturday - am

Treetops (SO 615:207) by kind invitation of Mr Simon Eeles for a walk around wooded and open areas where he is in the process of building up a bird friendly environment. As parking is fairly limited at Treetops, we will park at Coughton Forge HR9 5SF (SO 601:211) by kind permission of Jim Wilkinson, our treasurer, who will lead the morning meeting and either walk or double up in cars to get to Treetops. Strenuous gradients in places, carry lunch. Afterwards we will drive to Lower Lydbrook (SO 597:170) where we will park the cars and proceed to walk along the bank of the river Wye downstream towards Welsh Bicknor. Stout footwear and waterproof clothing essential, no dogs please.

Leader: John Pullen (tel 01600 750266)

Ross-on-Wye to Kern Bridge

April 18th Saturday

Meet at Wilton Bridge car park (SO 593:241) at 9.00am. We will need to have a shuttle service with some cars at either end where vehicles can transport drivers back from Kern Bridge at the end of the walk, so please let me know in advance if you can help? The 6 mile walk will be downstream along the river Wye with mixed habitat and a good variety of birds. Waterproof footwear essential, easy gradients in most places, carry lunch, no dogs please.

Leader: Nick Smith (tel 07831 730676)

HOC INDOOR MEETINGS PROGRAMME TO SPRING 2015

Every 2nd Thursday in the month. Held at the Holmer Parish Centre (SO505:423) Holmer, Hereford. On the A49, Leominster Road, just north of 'The Starting Gate Inn' roundabout and on left by Holmer Parish Church; car park and other facilities. All meetings are on Thursdays at 7.30pm. A suggested donation of £2 for members, £3 non-members, includes refreshments.

Nov 13th - Mike Lane 'A Digital Lane' (Starts with Black Grouse in Scotland, Finland - Brown Bears & diving Osprey and amazing drinking pools for birds in Hungary etc.)

Dec 11th - Dave Fletcher 'The Arctic Tundra'

2015

Jan 8th - Terry Wall 'Country Wall' (around the UK. Forest of Dean, Cairngorms, Outer Hebrides, Wales. Speciality - birds & mammal)

Feb 12th - Dr Walker Memorial Lecture - Michael Leach 'In the blink of an eye' - (high speed/time span)

Mar 12th - AGM & Dutch Supper & Members Contributions.

MEETING RAY MEARS

by Nicky Davies

One day back in July, I was going about my daily business when the telephone rang. I answered it and the voice at the other end said "Hello, I am called Ian and I work for Ray Mears and we would like to film a feature on woodpeckers in the Wye Valley - can you help?"

Initially thinking this was a stitch up, I went along with it. It then became a little more serious and it was explained to me that they were filming a one-off programme of Ray Mears, explorer and naturalist, looking at old cultures, history and wildlife along the Wye Valley. They chose woodpeckers as they are reportedly Rays favourite birds as well as being iconic to this area.

I was asked if I could choose a suitable location for filming - preferably an old orchard alongside the river. I was contacted by a gentleman called John Litchfield who owns a 9-acre orchard in Mordiford. Hurrah - I had the site, I had the correct habitat - now all I needed was the birds!

I met John and we visited the orchard to do a recce. After wandering around for a couple of hours we managed to get sightings of great spotted and green woodpeckers and we even flushed a little owl from a cavity in a standing dead tree - what a treat!

A few days later, I went back to the orchard and met Abbie - a camera woman, to do some preliminary filming. It drizzled with rain, swirling buzzards above caused chaos amongst the bird life so all in all, not a good time or place to film woodpeckers! Green woodies were heard a couple of times and great spotted woodies were seen fleetingly. As we walked back towards the cars feeling a little down in the dumps, I spotted a great spot on a dead perry pear tree so finally we got some footage, albeit in the distance and not great quality.

On the main day of filming two camera people, one sound technician, the senior researcher, programme director and Ray turned up. We positioned ourselves under a camo net in an appropriate position and started to wait.... and wait.....

After a couple of hours, our eyes started to drift and although there were no woodies to be seen, a marsh tit was feeding on thistle seeds under an apple tree. A good distraction and fascinating but NOT woodpeckers! We filmed them going about their feeding just the same. I finally spotted a great spotted woodpecker on a pock-marked telegraph pole. It was elusive and pretty scruffy (mid-moult) but at least we saw and had footage of a woodpecker, what a relief!

Ray then chatted to me for half an hour or so before interviewing me - asking me about the Woodpeckers of Herefordshire project and it's findings. He also told me about his love for birds and his attachment with traditional orchards.

We finished off with some camera footage of the pair of us strolling through the orchard kitted up with bins, listening out for woodpeckers en route to the pub.

We had a lovely day - heard great spotted and green woodpeckers so not all was lost but maybe we will have to return, just in case a previously recorded lesser spotted woodpecker wants to appear on the silver screen, you never know!

The programme is a one-off, hour-long special due to be screened on ITV in January. More details about this will be released soon and put on the HOC website in the news section.



HOC Field Meeting Reports

Cwmmau Farm, Brilley

12th July 2014

Leader: Gerald Parker

On a bright sunny morning 13 members arrived and parked in the spacious parking area at Cwmmau Farm by kind permission of the National Trust. Swallows and house martins were zooming all around us as they took insects from the air. Some house sparrows and a juvenile pied wagtail were hopping around some of the many old outbuildings and swallows were skimming in and out through the smallest gaps.

After a brief panic of finding ones way out of the yard by the leader we were soon walking through pasture with high hedges with mature hardwood trees and making contact with several avian species, swifts cut across the sky. Blackcaps were singing nearby and a great spotted woodpecker flew in. Juvenile redstarts were seen as they pounced from the lower branches onto some hapless insects and a spotted flycatcher was located by most of the group as it moved through. The beautiful song of a skylark wafted from a adjacent field and a tree pipit was also found nearby. As we progressed towards a large area of woodland that forms the south eastern border of the estate we all began to realise just how big the farm is. Blue tits and great tits were hunting caterpillars in the tree tops and a family of mistle thrushes were flitting just ahead of us. A juvenile nuthatch was seen and some long-tailed tits were moving through a nearby hawthorn. On the woodland edge we found a small stream with a stone bridge over it, here one of the group had a brief glimpse of a possible dipper as it flew downstream. As the wood seemed to be a good place to explore we made our way along tracks where timber had previously been removed and keeping our eyes and ears open. However we were disappointed as there were hardly any birds to be found - this was probably because the day was now heating up considerably and this is the time of the year when most birds are resting after a busy breeding season. We retraced our steps and made our way via Ashen Coppice and Fernhill Coppice where we were glad to stop for lunch and a welcome cool drink. On the way we found marsh tit, stock dove, buzzard, goldfinch, chiffchaff and song thrush.

Whilst partaking of our picnic lunch we were rewarded with a view of a red kite which flew directly over us and close views of a male redstart on a nearby fence post. Moderately refreshed we made our way upward following the hedge at the field boundary, here we found bullfinch and a distant view of a male yellowhammer. A greenfinch and some linnets were noted near the farm as we climbed steadily upwards. Reaching the top we found ourselves on a bridleway and continuing diagonally across the next field made contact with the road. By now it was the hottest part of the day and birdlife had dwindled so had a steady walk back down the lane to the farm where our cars were parked.

A total of 41 bird species were found and my thanks go to all who attended especially the individuals who wrestled with the complicated knots holding some of the gates together. On this delightful farm with its old pastures and abundance of wild flowers and grasses many insects were found, amongst which were Southern hawker dragonfly, ringlet, small tortoiseshell, red admiral, small skipper, speckled wood, meadow brown butterflies, large yellow underwing, common Wainscott and six-spot burnett moths.

Yarkhill Parish

27th July 2014

Leader: Brian Willder

Compiled by Gerald Parker

Owing to Yarkhill organising a village fete on the day of our HOC walk we were unable to park our cars in the intended position by the church. However, we were allowed to park in the shade of an orchard at the other end of the village and it was from here, still on our route, that eight of us set out on a beautiful sunny morning.

While we assembled we noted; robin, jackdaw, wren, chaffinch and house sparrow. Our walk took us along, an overgrown bridle way towards Garford Farm. As we came out into the open fields there were seven ravens circulating on a thermal. These were probably local birds that had been fledged on Shucknall Hill which has always been a stronghold for the raven.

The bridle path south of Garford is along a wide grass margin and today was sunny and sheltered and provided a host of butterflies including; meadow brown, gatekeeper, ringlet, red admiral, small

white and small skipper. Later we were to find small tortoiseshell caterpillars on nettles.

There were swallows and house martins on the wing, buzzards were maintaining contact with their young and a great spotted woodpecker was heard. At the farmyard pond we could only find semi domesticated mallard but there were crows on the yard and a magpie in the distance.

From the farm we took a footpath in a northerly direction towards the Monkhide road. This led us past some ponds, probably constructed for fishing, which was home to coot, moorhen, mallard, tufted duck and little grebe. Upon joining the Monkhide road we made our way towards the village passing the fields belonging to Showle Court, an organic dairy farm. Here there was a large flock of rooks and a discussion ensued concerning the identification of juveniles and rooks ability to 'loaf' or kill time when they had nothing else to do!

After crossing the Old Gloucester to Hereford Canal we followed a footpath towards Newtown cross roads. This passed through farm land that is less intensively farmed than the land through which we had come. There were some old traditional orchards and marshy grassland where I had, in the past, seen redstart and right on cue one was spotted! There was also a glimpse of spotted flycatcher, a green woodpecker was calling and a little owl flew from an old tree. A small flock of starlings were busy in the orchard and chiffchaff, linnet and goldfinch were heard.

On reaching the summit of Windmill Hill, 104 meters above sea level, we paused to admire the view and buzzards displaying their aerobatic skills.

From here we followed the old green road which runs from Newtown cross roads to Monkhide. The only new birds we found over this section were song thrush and collard dove. The canal crossing did not yield a kingfisher as it has in the past in fact the canal looks neglected and overgrown. The next section was a continuation of the old green lane which passed behind Showle Court and on to Watery Lane (the road to Yarkhill). This lane, for much of its length, runs beside 'modern' cider orchards where we heard greenfinch and bullfinch and a sparrow hawk were seen. Upon joining Watery Lane we walked, along the road, beside the river Frome but found nothing to add to our list, the day was getting warm and lunch was calling.

By the time we reached our cars, shade and lunch no one was feeling energetic enough to continue in the afternoon so we called it a day!

Brandon Marsh Nature Reserve

16th August 2014

Leader: Gerald Parker

Sometimes a large group can be a disadvantage in birdwatching especially if they get split up with the result that people at the rear miss birds seen at the front and vice versa. However this problem didn't arise on this occasion as the group consisted of my wife and myself.

The Warwickshire Wildlife Trusts visitor centre at Brandon Marsh is very well organised with a good retail area, cafeteria, a comprehensive library, wildlife garden and children's adventure area.

As with most nature reserves August is generally a quiet month, however with seven hides to investigate and extensive walks through woodland areas something should turn up. A green woodpecker was heard then seen as it searched for food among the many ant hills, swallows flew all around us and chiffchaffs were active among the many low trees, a robin was singing nearby and a pair of buzzards were soaring overhead. The many pools and reedbeds held a good assortment of water birds among which were mallard, Canada goose, coot, lapwing, mute swan, greylag goose, black-headed gull, lesser black-backed gull, moorhen, shoveller, gadwall, teal, cormorant and a couple of juvenile pintail. Having visited all but one hide and walked all accessible footpaths we made our way to the Steetley hide overlooking west marsh pool. We settled in and thinking nothing much about, a kingfisher suddenly appeared on a small overhanging branch about 30 metres away and stayed for about 20 minutes during which time it caught 4 small fish, these opportunities always present themselves when ones camera is at home!! Just as we were about to close the flaps on the hide a raptor appeared, going quite fast, and sure enough was identified as a hobby with a hapless dragonfly held firmly in its talons. A wonderful bird to end the day with. Altogether we found 35 species and spent an enjoyable day at this splendid nature reserve.

Ross-on-Wye and Hartleton Lakes

3rd September 2014

Leader: Gerald Parker

Nine members gathered at the Wilton car park and we soon joined the 'John Kyrle' circular walk beside the River Wye. We managed to find a feeding station close to the 'Hope and Anchor' pub among the normal species were 2 coal tit and a singing chiffchaff. Beyond Wilton Bridge were four juvenile bullfinch, 2 kingfisher's flying along the river, a pair of mute swan with 5 juveniles and a single goosander.

On arrival at Ross sewage works around the circular fencing we soon found many birds including 8 reed bunting, 3 blackcap, 1 grey wagtail, blue tits, robin, blackbird, goldfinch and greenfinch.

We diverted from the walk to pass through Cleeve Orchard and one member spotted a fresh juvenile lesser whitethroat we all obtained good telescope views of this beautiful bird.

After lunch we drove to Hartleton Lakes for the afternoon, in very nice sunshine we enjoyed seeing 6 grey heron scattered around the lakes, 2 pairs of gadwall, grey wagtail, great-crested grebe and 8 yellow wagtail on the adjoining Golf course.

NB For information on the 'John Kyrle' circular walk please try this link:-

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/3238876/john_kyrle_circular_walk.pdf

Staunton-on-Wye and Monnington 20th September 2014

Leader: Mike Williams

On a mild September morning nine of us set off on a roundabout walk through the parishes of Staunton on Wye and Monnington on Wye. Much of the walk was through typical Herefordshire countryside – familiar and lovely. Some of the walk, however, took us through the newer landscapes of the county – intensive cider orchards with bright red lines of fallen apples under the trees and polytunnels filled with enormous raspberries and busy eastern European fruit pickers.

We walked upstream along the Wye and ate our sandwiches in Monnington churchyard, with coal tits calling above us in the yew tree. Along the avenue of Monnington Walk we watched busy flocks of blue and long-tailed tits. In a nearby field we saw twenty greenfinches feeding in a patch of specially planted wild bird seed mix. At the end of Monnington Walk we reached Brobury Scar with a spectacular view of the Wye that compares with Symonds Yat. Then back across a few more fields to our cars at Staunton. We watched four fallow deer quietly wandering across a field and we found the strange tufted caterpillar of the pale tussock moth. And we saw forty nine species of birds. Highlights included good views of a green woodpecker, small flocks on linnets and goldfinches, siskin, goldcrest, marsh tit, red kite, sparrowhawk, heron, grey wagtail and many more. It was a very enjoyable day, and it stayed mild and dry for us.

Obituary - Joan Gardner

Joan was born in Eccles on 1st Jan 1925, first worked in the Accounts Dept of the Co-op dealing with the Coal accounts. In the war she worked for Women's Land Army maintaining and driving caterpillar tractors in Radnorshire where she met Peter. They were married in Oct 1947 and were married for 67 years. Peter said Joan was a private person, very capable, strong willed, in charge with firm clear views and did not want any fuss made about her immense contribution to the running of the Club. She was always involved in sorting record cards with Peter when he was Club Bulletin Editor for over forty years and also put the Bulletin into envelopes and bought a typewriter so as to be able to address over 600 envelopes to send out the Bulletins to members, in those days Radnorshire members also belonged to the Club. Joan also helped Peter look after over a 100 nest boxes at Mary Koll. It is because of the loyalty and hard work of members like Joan that quietly go about their business that the success of the Club has over the years been built on. Thank you Joan.

John Pullen

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Small ads for members wishing to sell or obtain bird-watching sundries such as books or binoculars are free of charge. Please enquire with the editor.

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Printed by Flying Colours, Croft Court, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 7AB: 01989 566443

SUBMISSIONS

Contributions to HOC NEWS should be received by the Editor by the 14th of January, April, July or October for the February, May, August or November issues respectively.

Email: nickydavies71@hotmail.com

Due to space and/or postal charges, contributions may be edited, shortened or divided into instalments at the Editor's discretion. Illustrations will be printed in black & white only. Photographs will also be used at the Editor's discretion but please note the printing process limits the quality of photocopying reproduction.

Leaders of Club Meetings are invited to send, or to arrange for another member attending to send, a report of the meeting for publication. These are best when written and sent in as soon as possible after the event.

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Adult £12: Joint members (same address) £18: Junior (up to 18 years) £5: Life Member £300: Senior Life Member £180: Joint Senior Life Members £270: Corporate Membership £25.00

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