

HOC NEWS

quarterly bulletin for herefordshire birdwatchers

232

February
2015

News from the Annual HOC trip
Away to Bridlington 2014 - an
insiders report!

page 4

Wellington Gravel
Pits access -
what you should
know

page 6

Robins -
Snippet No.7.
Their
vocabulary

page 10



Editorial

by Nicky Davies

Hello - and welcome to the January edition of the HOC newsletter. There is a lot of information in this edition including trip reports, an insightful report from the annual HOC week away in Brighton, as well as plenty of club activity news.

In addition, there is some useful information regarding HOC members accessing Wellington Gravel Pits. This important site for birds, and possibly one of the most popular with local birders is a resource which must be respected as working gravel pits and as such, we must adhere to the access rules and public rights of way in place. We have been fortunate enough to forge an excellent partnership with the operators and would like to maintain this relationship for many years to come by ensuring that the site is respected by our members and non-members.

In Treasurers Jottings, Jim Wilkinson has sent a reminder for members to renew their subscriptions - it's that time of year so don't forget. Ooh, that reminds me, I must do mine!

And, we have the return of our favourite robins. What Guy Woodford doesn't know about robins isn't worth knowing. Take a look at page 11 for Snippet no.7. Yes, our regular feature is back after a break in the last edition of HOC News and this time Guy is looking at the vocabulary of robins and what it means.

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 April. If you have any queries about submitting information, please contact me on (07855 126642) or email at nickydavies71@hotmail.com

Happy birding



Mediterranean Gull by John Tillby

Contents

Editorial	2
HOC Week away 2014	4
HOC Autumn Trip News 2015	5
Notes from the Chair	6
Wellington Gravel Pits Access	6
HOC sighting highlights	7
Desert Island Birder	8
HOC field meetings 2015	9
Treasurers jottings	9
HOC Indoor Meetings diary	10
Robins. Snippet no.7	10
HOC Field Meetings Reports	12
Chukar update	14
Advertising/Submissions/Contacts	16

'Count the Primaries'. HOC Week Away 2014. Bridlington 6th - 10th October

By Gareth Morgan

On a grey, wet Monday, eighteen club members made their way from various locations to the Bay Ridge hotel in Bridlington, where we were greeted with a welcome cup of tea or coffee to help us relax before we started birding in earnest. The blame for the unremitting rain was put down to the jet stream being in the wrong place. This was a worthless piece of information, because there was nothing any of us could do about it. *Besides, birders are naturally tough and uncomplaining.*

The rain and wind were not quite so powerful as to deter some of us from making our way to the sea front and the harbour, but it was advisory to wear water- and windproof outer garments. Very healthy start to the week, brisk sea air helping to blow away the stress of up to five hours driving. As is only to be expected from an environmentally conservative group, one of our number was extolling the virtues of bus and rail travel, having made the one way journey from Hereford for a total cost of less than £14.00. *Birders are known to be thrifty.*

As soon as our glorious leader Chris and the Leaderene Pam had arrived we placed our orders for dinner and for Tuesday's packed lunch, and assembled in the bar area, where we regaled ourselves with stories of past expeditions and plans for the coming week.

Tuesday brought us cool mist, but the morning was mostly dry. We set off for Filey Dams, which is a reserve of FBOG (Filey Bird Observatory & Group). The car park for the Dams is situated on the edge of a housing estate. En route the chairman realised that both he and his wife had assumed that it was the responsibility of the other to bring the binoculars. A quick turnaround, back to the hotel, problem solved. In time to join the other members before setting off for Filey Brigg Country Park and sea watching. Lunch in cars while the rain fell steadily. As soon as the rain stopped we all moved our cars nearer to the headland and walked to the cliff top to add to our tally of sightings. scoter, eider, bonxie and Manx shearwater were only some of the highlights. As a special treat, some of the more adventurous members braved the descent of a steeply inclined cliff path, which led them to a point from which they could swim around the headland for no discernible purpose. A visiting HOC member, who had tried the same path a decade earlier, described it as walking down a razor blade. *Birders are explorers too.* Then the rain settled in again, so we made our way back to the hotel for a welcome dinner, followed by the daily bird count. This is always an exhilarating time, when the experts can vie with each other for supremacy. *Except, of course, that birders are too self-effacing to behave in such a way.*

Wednesday brought sunshine, so we all made our way to RSPB Bempton Cliffs for more sea watching, and the excitement of seeing gannets, auks and terns at relatively close range. The day went well, as we travelled onwards to the area around Flamborough Head, with opportunities for going to the hides at Thornwick Pool, sited within the Thornwick and Sea Farm Holiday Centre, plus Selwicks Bay and the Bay Brambles area, which are local hotspots for migrants. Birders are always optimistic. We rounded off the afternoon with a sumptuous WI Tea, organised by the Leaderene, in preparation for which we had consciously reduced our food intake at lunchtime. The hospitality was well up to standard, and we all thoroughly enjoyed the repast set before us. *Birders are always appreciative.*

The conversation of the day was a reasoned discussion about the observable differences between a dunlin and a curlew sandpiper. Reference books were produced, scrutinised, dismissed and reinstated until finally an agreed decision was made. Phew! *Birders are nothing if not thorough.*

Thursday - our final complete day - dawned sunny, so we set off for Hornsea Mere, where flocks of little gulls anticipated our arrival by not being there at all. Not in the least upset - *birders are stoic folk* - we advanced on Kilnsea Wetlands Nature Reserve, and enjoyed sightings of waders, after which we moved on to Spurn NNR, courtesy of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, where those of us who are members of HNT procured free parking. The road is foreshortened by natural events, so we went on foot as far as we could, taking careful note of the prominent signs reminding us that time and tide wait for no man. Highlights of the day were massive flocks of knot and superb close views of dunlin, with some high quality photographs to remind us. Back to the hotel for a final dinner and bird count, which by this time had reached 100, plus a discussion as to where to go in 2015. *Birders are always seeking new and exciting ways of improving their range of destinations.*

Friday came, and some of us moved on immediately after breakfast, while the hard core went south to RSPB Blacktoft Sands, near Goole. This was a first for some of us, and the weather was good, so we explored as many of the hides as was worthwhile, enjoying sightings of snipe, marsh harrier, lapwing and golden plover. We had ordered packed lunches, which we enjoyed sitting in the car park, watching an inquisitive sparrowhawk until it was time to go home. Leader Chris and Leaderene Pam had organised yet another special holiday for us all, and we are truly grateful to them. *Birders can be good companions too.*



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

HOC Autumn Trip 2015

This year's event will be to the **Hampshire/Dorset** border for 4 nights from **Monday 12th to Friday 16th October**. John Vickerman has kindly agreed to be our guide and at this time of year we should find a wide variety of woodland, heathland and shore birds, including migrants.

We have arranged accommodation at the **Moorhill House Hotel, Burley**, in the heart of the New Forest at a cost for a double room of **£405.60** for the four nights, including breakfast and a 3-course dinner. Single rooms are also available at £190.80 for the four nights. A non-returnable deposit of £30 per person is required to secure a booking, with the balance payable one month before the trip.

If you would like to take part please contact **Chris Bartlett** by phone **01989 721080**, or e-mail cjsbartlett@btinternet.com

Notes from the Chair

by Gareth Morgan

Spring is on the way, and it is time once again to put on your boots and start birding in the open air. It is also time to prepare a list of questions for people who ask for your vote in national and local elections. Example : what are your manifesto pledges to preserve and improve the habitat for birds and other wildlife in Herefordshire and nationally; have you met all your previous targets; if not, why not?

This is well within our terms of reference, and is our only national opportunity in five years to make ourselves, and what we stand for, known to prospective candidates.

Enough of politics. There is a new challenge facing us : the task of transposing handwritten records from the 1970's until the 1990's onto a computer based spreadsheet. We are fortunate enough to have a legacy from the past, several volumes of records relating to birds in Herefordshire and Radnorshire, meticulously entered in hard back exercise books, which can be put to better use than sitting in a cupboard. As ever, we rely on volunteers to maintain the scientific and historical value of our Club, and in this instance this task can be accomplished by anyone, of any age, provided that they are reasonably familiar with computers. Please don't hang back; contact myself or any member of your committee if you are willing to be part of this important duty. You may even find that there are people in your own household who would relish the experience as an alternative to watching mindless television.

To end, my three year term of office as your chairman is nearly complete. Thank you for giving me your support. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to serve you.

May the Club continue to flourish for many more years. Best wishes throughout 2015 and beyond.

Access to Wellington Gravel pits

The Executive committee wish to clarify the rights of access to Wellington Gravel pits and the following details are provided:

Access to the site is by the public footpath that runs from the A49 at SO500478, joining the minor road to Marden at SO515478. Parking is usually possible in the lay-by on the A49 opposite the start. The path runs through the centre of the area just north of the main pit, fly fishing pit and the new workings; other smaller pits are also visible to the north. The hide is situated on the path overlooking the main pit at SO509478. For those approaching from Marden, there is a pedestrian crossing over the railway at SO511478 and due care should be taken crossing the line.

It should be noted that the route of the path has changed from that indicated on many OS maps, but it is very clearly signposted throughout the site and easy to follow.

During quarry working hours, members may park in the visitors' car park (situated on the left, just inside the main entrance gate at SO509482). Sign in at the weigh-bridge and take the fly-fishing club (HFFC) footpath south to join the public footpath at the hide.

The main gates to the workings are locked by the last member of staff leaving the site, and the key-holder is not local. Check at the weigh-bridge for the latest time you can remain parked, so that no-one has to leave their car until the next working day!

There is no agreement for birdwatchers to access the site through the main entrance outside quarry working hours. The only access at these times is by the public footpath described above.

HOC SIGHTING HIGHLIGHTS

October - December 2014 Compiled by Mick Colquhoun (County Recorder)

During the three months up until 31st December 2014, the following notable birds have been recorded in the county:

Black redstart at Hereford cathedral. Seen by many in November / December. John Tilby's photos suggest that there have almost certainly been two separate individuals this winter.

Common scoter 27/11 WGP 3 individuals (2M, 1F) found by Gerry Bilbao.

Mediterranean gull 02/10 Kenchester pools (John Tilby), 16/11 Lower Lugg meadows (Steve Coney).

Long tailed duck at Hereford quarry (female) found 05/12 stayed around for 10 days (Tony Eveleigh).

Pink footed goose 10/11 at Hereford quarry (Alan Marchant and Tony Eveleigh).

Red grouse 25/10 Red Daren (John Tilby).

Red crested pochard 22/11 WGP (Steve Coney, Paul Downes)

Scaup All reported by John Tilby. Video evidence suggests that the bird seen on 09/12 was a hybrid (06/12 BGP, 07/12 WGP, 09/12 BGP, 10/12 BGP, 13/12 BGP, 26/12 BGP)

White fronted goose (hybrid long stayer) BGP first reported 04 / 10 (Gerry Bilbao.)

Yellow browed warbler Ginhall Lane, Leominster 15 / 10 (John Kedward).

Hawfinch at the Doward 26/12 (I Draycott)

Barn Owl 21/12 Moreton on Lugg (Steve Coney), 21/11 Bushy Pitch (Brian Wilder), 18/11 Priors Frome (Steve Coney)

Lesser spotted woodpecker 09/12 Ewyas Harold Common (S. Young), 19/10 Bredwardine (Mike Bailey)

Merlin WGP 23/11 (Espen Quinto-Ashman), 22/10 Stocklow (P Jennings).

Woodcock 23/11 (Espen Quinto-Ashman)

Whooper swans regularly roosting at WGP Late November

Osprey WGP 11/10 (Espen Quinto-Ashman)

Ring ouzel 03/10 1M,1F,1juv The Darrens (Tony Eveleigh/John Pullen) 05/10 2F The Darrens (Chris Robinson).

Brent Goose 04/10 BGP (John Tilby)

Jack Snipe 1/10 WGP (Nick Pegler)

Peregrines regularly seen throughout the period in the city centre on All Saints Church or on the Cathedral.

TREASURERS JOTTINGS

HOC subscriptions were due at the beginning of January, unchanged at £12 single; £18 joint, and should be paid at the latest by end of February. So far, some 220 members have paid by Standing Order. Please let me know if you would like to join them and I will send you a form. Otherwise you may pay by cheque (made out to HOC) or via on-line banking to HOC's account at HSBC 40-24-11 00430455. Please put your surname followed by initials in the *Reference* field.

Included with this News are the Annual Accounts for 2013/14. Please get in touch with me if you want any clarification especially if you can't make it to the AGM in March.

Jim Wilkinson, HOC Treasurer

DESERT ISLAND BIRDER

NAME & HOC POSITION

Nicky Davies. HOC Newsletter Editor

FAVOURITE BIRD AND WHY

Great Skua because its big, its bold and puts up with no messing! A hugely intelligent bird that reminds me of my time living and working in Shetland in a beautiful landscape

FAVOURITE BIRDING PATCH IN HEREFORDSHIRE

Cusop Hill. This hidden gem supports a wide variety of woodland and moorland birds. I always see something exciting when out walking with my dog and the views are great! There is a fabulous network of footpaths that can take you into some of the more remote parts of the County on the margins of the Black Mountains that only local people use. Shh, don't tell anyone....

HOW DID YOU GET INTO BIRDWATCHING?

As a late starter, I was fortunate enough to land the most amazing job as warden on the Island of Noss NNR in Shetland. Parts of my work included monitoring seabirds (and other breeding birds) and driving the ferry (a small inflatable zodiac boat) for island visitors. The only house on the island was the one where my fellow warden and I stayed. My job was paid to watch birds. What's not to love!

WHAT DO YOU GET UP TO WHEN NOT WATCHING BIRDS

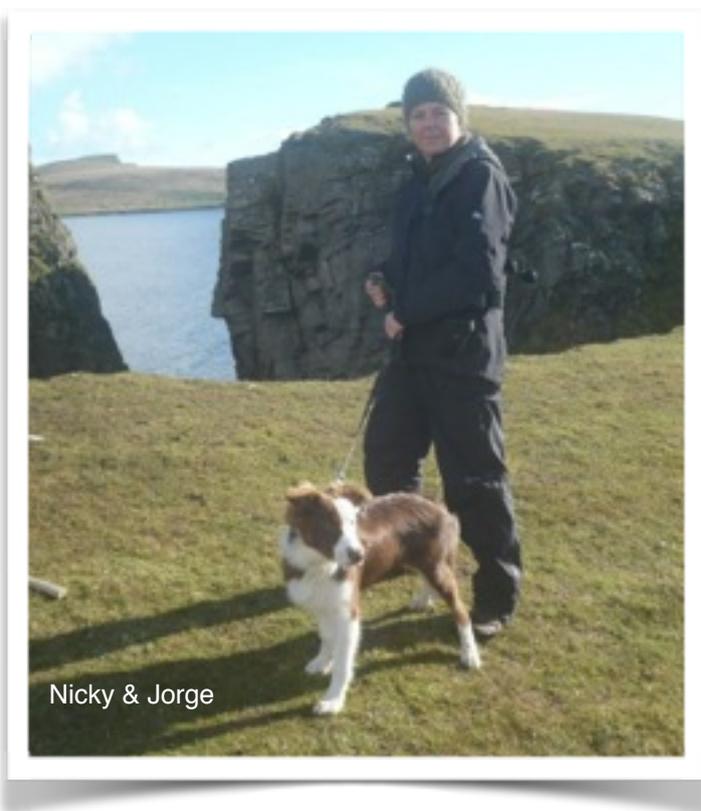
I am currently studying full time for a Masters degree in Environment Conservation Management so when not sat behind a computer, I love getting out and about in the local countryside with my beautiful dog "Jorge" and camping in my small, but beautifully formed tent.

ESSENTIAL BIRDING ACCESSORY

Well, I could say the usual binoculars, notepad, etcetera BUT I own a storm kettle which allows me to make a fresh brew using dried grass and twigs (to fuel it, not to drink). Better than a flask and made using love, effort and natural resources.

EARLIEST BIRDING MEMORIES

I was a member of YOC and was told I was taking part in a sponsored birdwatch. To ramp up my donations, I thought it would be clever to add a few species to my list so as a 10 year old, I added a handful of national rarities - all in the name of charity. It was noticed when my list was submitted to my teacher and they were removed, although I was commended for using my initiative. Sorry mum!



Nicky & Jorge

HOC Field Meetings 2015 February-April

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, Ross-on-Wye

March 21st Saturday

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) at 09.30 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)

Olchon Valley

May 12th Tuesday

Meet at the Darrens car park (SO298:299) at 9.15 am. We will look for Ring Ouzels and other migrants. To do so we will walk up into the Black Darren, and afterwards we shall visit other parts of the valley by car to birdwatch. We will finish at Clodock to look for dippers around 3.00 pm. Lunch in cars. Steep gradients in places. Waterproof footwear essential. No dogs please.

Leader: John Pullen (tel: 01600 750266)

HOC INDOOR MEETINGS PROGRAMME TO SPRING 2015

Every 2nd Thursday in the month. Held at the Holmer Parish Centre (SO505:423) Holmer, Hereford, HR4 9RG. 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.

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.

There is ample car parking and all modern facilities. For more details and a map go to

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/leisure-and-culture/community-halls/holmer-parish-church-centre>

Everyone Welcome

Snippet no. 7. ROBINS – their vocabulary and some of its meanings – part 2 by Guy Woodford

With song and subsong covered in part 1, here I explore some of their other forms of communication.

First the tsee or tseep: this is best known as the begging call of the fledgling, fresh out of the nest, desperate to be fed and often submerged in deep vegetation. At the beginning of the breeding season it is also used by the broody female urging the male to feed her in 'courtship feeding'.

At other times robins of all ages use it as a contact call and especially between siblings. In the Indian summer of last September and the warm but wet following months it was widely used for another purpose: with mild weather and a continuing profusion of insects, the urgency to set up viable autumn territories was delayed. Robins, young and old, were content to carve out mini-territories. Here the tseep was frequently heard and acted as a placatory call between unusually close neighbours. Even old robins were sounding like fledglings. These experienced birds were seemingly aware of but hoping to offset the territorial battles of severe winter, when bolder robins enlarge their territories by driving away their more timid neighbours.

A degree of nervousness is present in most calls and at its height in full blooded alarm calls.

In the breeding season parent robins employ two such calls to warn of predators. A harsh rattling tic tic tic for ground predators such as rats, weasels and of course cats. A long drawn out tseeee for those overhead. These long notes have the added benefit that it is hard to locate the source. But the choice of alarm is not so simple. Three and a half years ago I watched and listened as a kestrel flew to the top of a high pole and perched above a hedgerow nest.

Both parents reacted: the cock with the predicted long notes but the hen darted about delivering a stream of metallic tics.

Both these calls are used all year round for other purposes. A single tic or a gentle run is much used as a contact call. As the volume and speed increase it does turn into alarm. At these other times the long *tseeee* with its inflection of complaint takes on another function: here two robins are present, one complaining, the other silent. The complainant is the landowner, the other an intruder who will almost invariably soon retreat. For the human observer seeing just one, it is a cue to search out the second robin.

Another sound, or rather family of sounds, also acts as a prompt to locate the second robin. These are quiet sounds, barely audible and the delivery is soft and conversational. They appear to be fragments of song or subsong and include gentle trills and rhythmic warbles. In my notes I lump these together as 'little sounds'. They are the across-the-fence acknowledgments between two robins each in its own territory but aware of the other's presence.

A variant of these 'little sounds' I term 'squeezed sounds'. The two robins are much closer and often one or both adopt the threat posture. The sounds are louder and faster and urgent, hence 'squeezed'. If the intruder does not retreat and a fight ensues the losing bird will add another sound, a series of piercing squeals.

Back to the early days at the nest, there are two at first baffling sounds. The one is remarkably like a miniature electric drill. It is in fact the collective begging call triggered as a parent arrives and jogs the rim of the nest. The other, again at the nest and out of sight, is made by the parent bird, a sort of reassuring chatter or flutter. Only after a tragedy on the day of leaving the nest, when all were lost but one, did I witness this chattering away from the leafy confines of the nest. It is the sound made by the parent bird when its offspring already fully fed holds its bill rigidly shut, but the parent is determined to cajole it to take yet another offering.

Then there is the *fizz*. After leaving the nest the fledglings beg to be fed. As the parent arrives with juicy insects, caterpillars and other goodies, the fledgling bubbles with anticipation and uncontrolled excitement. At this moment it gurgles with a fizzing sound. In courtship feeding a fair number of hen robins also add the *fizz* to their vocabulary.

And then there is the 'rattle'. This is a bubbling sound with rise and fall, the notes undulate in pitch and speed of delivery. I watched and listened as a cock robin chaperoned several fledglings through thick vegetation. The prevailing tone was one of nurture and reassurance, occasionally rising to a protective *tic tic tic*. Only then did I realise that this rattle is a mellow and fluid version of the otherwise mechanical, metallic alarm. In a different setting a solitary male robin warbled the 'rattle' very quietly to himself, much like inward looking subsong with its air of contentment.

Getting inside the robins' vocabulary enlarges the picture. Rather than being lonely birds in separate kingdoms they have heaps of vocal interplay across boundaries, interspersed with gentle musings and only occasional displays of anger.

HOC Field Meeting Reports

Wellington Gravel Pits

16th November 2014

Leader: Geof Davies

10 HOC members met at the main entrance at 9am. The forecast was for cloudy with drizzle. Im happy to say no drizzle. First job was to introduce myself and to find someone to note the birds. Mr Mike Williams volunteered to do that, good man!

The hedgerow offered us very little as we climbed the gate; robin, blue tit and blackbird, it might get better - lets hope so. The roadside pit is almost invisible through the hedgerows but we did get tufted and Mallard ducks. The next two pits gave us coot, moorhen and a very loud water rail. Some members were amazed at the squealing noise they make. pulled the bolt on the hide, couldn't see the scrape for overgrown bushes and brambles. The chiffchaff was fluttering about in the one bush. The only other birds seen from the hide were the roosting cormorants in the trees on the island of the main pit. The pathway offered better views of teal, wigeon, Canada geese, mute swans and great crested grebes. The pathway from the hide to the next pit was exquisite for birds. the hawthorn bushes were alive with redwings and fieldfares also great tit, chaffinch, bullfinch, a pair of brambling and a female lesser redpoll. A few more steps into the open space and a dozen skylark flew over. At this point we were joined by our 11th member, Mr Gerald Parker. We then walked the brook up to the main roadway to new workings. Long tailed tits were dancing through the hedgerow and a dunnock in view. New workings were poor, not allowed in, the club would have been banned. Many of my party went over to the fishing pit at this point, one of the anglers had just landed a 20lb pike, a monster - thats for sure!

Anyway, onto the rest of the pits, still more birds found including grey heron, pochard, goldeneye, goosander, gadwall, shoveller, little grebe, green sandpiper, a perched little owl which was awoken by a charm of 40 goldfinches, also 30 lapwing flying over, a reed bunting and a greenfinch were seen briefly. Also seen were meadow pipits, buzzard, song and mistle thrushes, ravens, green woodpecker and stock doves. Thanks to all who attended, and the ones who didn't - you missed 57 species!

Chasewater

30th November 2014

Leaders: Phil and Chris Williams

After an early start and a long journey, five members met at ten am at the Innovation Centre at Chasewater Country Park on the edge of Cannock Chase on a cool fine morning, ready for the four and a half mile walk around the reservoir. The reservoir was at a reasonable level, quite a difference from the visit made in 2011 when the dam was under repair and the reservoir nearly empty.

Bullfinch and Song Thrush were the highlights seen before we moved away from the car park. Numbers of the common species of gull were seen and some time was spent trying (and sadly failing) to identify one specific juvenile gull. Coots were there in great abundance.

Crossing the canal that leads away from the dam, we saw Moorhens and a Jay, we then went into a mixed woodland area. Along the pathway amongst the scrub, Chaffinch, Great Tit and Redwing were seen and heard and a fox crossed our path carrying a large rabbit. We crossed a board walk over a wetland habitat, the lack of birds was made up for by the sighting of 4 Red Deer. On a small pool a Heron and some Teal were spotted. Across the reservoir several Golden Eye and a good number of Lapwings were seen.

By lunch time the sun had decided to put in an appearance and we found seats on a ridge overlooking the Country Park and Cannock Chase. There we saw Sparrow Hawk, Kestrel, Raven and a flock of Goldfinch.

Continued. The afternoon took us round the smaller lakes and then back along the side of the reservoir. Pochard, Wigeon, Gadwall Goosander and Little Grebe were observed.

Early afternoon the sun disappeared and it began to get quite cold. We left the reservoir at around 3.15.

In total 45 species were seen due to the keen eyes and hearing of the members in the group. Thanks to all for making it a good day out.

Credenhill Wood and Brockhall GP

10th December 2014

Leader: Gerald Parker

At the appointed time nine members assembled at the car park on a sunny dry morning but with a strong NE biting wind facing us.

Many birds were moving around us with redwings popping up and down in the hedgerows, a party of fieldfares flew over very fast with the wind behind them, no time to get binoculars up but their noisy calls gave them away. A pair of stock doves were seen and a mistle thrush was hopping around in a nearby meadow.

Walking upwards along the well-surfaced track a group of small birds were seen foraging among the beech trees where obviously a good supply of beechmast was to be found these included blue tit, coal tit, great tit, goldcrest and chaffinch. A robin was ticking from nearby cover and a jay screeched up ahead.

As we neared the north west corner of the wood, there are several yew trees with quite a few still having berries on them and here many small birds were taking advantage of this, amongst which were a pair of marsh tits. A nuthatch played hide and seek between feeding on them and a great spotted woodpecker flew across.

After crossing the open space we descended into an area of larch trees where more feeding activity was noticed, here we found more marsh tits, blue tits, treecreepers and a few siskins feeding quietly in the tops amongst the seed cones. Moving along the path more small birds consisting of bluetits, coal tits and chaffinches were found, larch certainly does seem to be the preferred food source also a small party of long-tailed tits were moving through. Having consumed lunch in the car park we moved on to Brockhall gravel pits, where we were greeted by 1000+ Canada geese who were busy grazing in an adjacent field, good numbers of wigeon were also present plus mallard, tufted duck, teal, little grebe, great crested grebe, coot, moorhen, heron, pochard and goosander. I was hoping that the female scaup might still be present but after considerable looking and scanning around the lake with telescopes it could not be found, very disappointing. So after a pleasant walk around the lake we took our leave of each other.

Altogether a total of 44 species were found making it a very pleasant day, thank you to all who attended.

Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge

10th January 2015

Leader: EH Eveleigh

Ten members met at WWT Slimbridge in very windy conditions we quickly moved to the Sloane Tower as the white-fronted geese happened to be feeding in a field not viewable from the hides. Two marsh harriers showed briefly in flight during our stay.

We then made our way to the Holden Tower viewing the tack piece on the way birds present were 250 black-tailed godwit, 300 dunlin, 1400 lapwing, 14 ruff and 35 redshank plus pintail, wigeon and teal occasionally everything became airborne and what a spectacle that was. A very showy water rail was seen down to a few metres from the Willow Hide also a female reed

bunting was on the feeders. From the Holden Tower two peregrines were present together with 1000 dunlin, 3500 lapwing, 2500 golden plover and 28 great-black backed gulls together with the feral flocks of barnacle and greylag geese. The very mobile dunlin were in three separate flocks flying up and down the estuary.

In the afternoon we visited the Kingfisher Hide. Everybody was so pleased to have close views of a Barn Owl hunting for prey. There were many Bewick swans present at the evening feeding in front of the Peng Observatory. 60 species were seen throughout the day.

Due to weather conditions and the exposed nature of the sites, the proposed visit to Battery Point and Portbury NR was moved to WWT Slimbridge.

(All figures above are as quoted for the day on the WWT Slimbridge website.)

CHUKAR UPDATE



Chukar by Richard Miller

Following the article in the last issue about the Chukar seen in Fownhope last May, Richard Miller looked critically at some photos he had taken in Hampton Bishop and realised that he had also recorded a chukar - see the attached photo taken on the 19th June 2014. Notice that the characteristic speckling around the neck seen in the red legged partridge is absent.

Look carefully at the red legged partridges you see and please report any chukar like individuals to the county recorder.

Mick Colquhoun

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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.

Support the work of the Herefordshire Ornithological Club by advertising in this Newsletter. Revenue raised helps conservation of habitat for wild birds (which includes other forms of wildlife), the study of wild birds and the promotion of their welfare through the publishing of data and survey reports, active co-operation with other bodies having similar aims and the education of the public in all related matters. All the officers of HOC give their services voluntarily.

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