

HOC NEWS

quarterly bulletin for herefordshire birdwatchers

236

February

2016

Breeding Status of Rare Birds in Herefordshire

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photo of buzzard by Mick Colquhoun



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Editorial

It's such a busy edition, there's no room for a long rambling from me this time. Jim Wilkinson has sent a reminder for members to renew their **subscriptions** - it's that time of year so please don't forget.

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. We now have **100 followers** - lets see if we can double that by next year! 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

Finally, congratulations to a Nick Smith for his BEM - a wonderful man. This is a well deserved award, we're all very proud of you.
Happy birding!

Nicky Davies

2016 New Year Honours

You will be delighted, as I was, to learn that our very own Nick Smith has been awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) in the 2016 New Year Honours. The official citation is:

“Nicholas Andrew Smith, Woodland Officer, Forestry Commission. For services to the Forestry and Environmental Sectors in Herefordshire and to Ornithology.”

The BEM, part of the Order of the British Empire, was reintroduced to the honours system in 2012 and is aimed to reward a sustained, local contribution.

Nick's contribution to the HOC has certainly fulfilled this criterion. Nick joined the Club in 1998 and was elected to Committee in 2001. He became Vice-Chairman in 2003 and in 2004 took on the additional role of Strategy Officer. At the 2006 AGM he was elected Chairman and was re-elected for a second term in 2009. On retiring as Chairman in 2012 Nick was elected Vice-President, the office from which he stepped down just last year. Through all these roles he has brought vision, enthusiasm and innovation and indeed, many other attributes, not least of which has been to encourage and inspire an interest in birds at all levels of expertise throughout the membership of the Club. All of Nick's qualities have also been expressed in an enormous volume of sheer hard work. You will all be aware of his pivotal role in bringing the Birds of Herefordshire Atlas project to fruition. As HOC Vice-Chairman he was a founder member of the Atlas Steering group formed in 2004 and remained a driving force within that group through to the successful publication of the book in 2014.

It is no overstatement to say that without Nick the Atlas would not have happened!

As reflected in the citation of his BEM, his major contribution to forestry and the environment has doubtless been conducted with the same dedication he has brought to all his work with HOC. And through his occupation in the Forestry Commission he has brought knowledge and skills in relation to habitat management and conservation for the benefit of ornithology.

Well done Nick; many congratulations on behalf of all members.

Gerald Wells, Chairman

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 200 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 2014/15. 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

Mick Colquhoun, County Recorder, Club Webmaster.

FAVOURITE BIRD AND WHY

That's difficult! I have had boxes in mid Wales for pied flycatchers for more than 30 years, but I think the Ring Ouzel, Raven and Chough just win. All three are difficult to photograph and all are great characters and individuals.

FAVOURITE BIRDING PATCH IN HEREFORDSHIRE

Old Gore, especially my garden and the immediate surrounds - there are some excellent birds passing through during the year and I can get close to the local ravens. I also have more nest boxes nearby as well.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO BIRDWATCHING?

The painted illustrations in Kirkman and Jourdain's 'British Birds' (1932) got me wanting to learn more about the subject.

WHAT DO YOU GET UP TO WHEN NOT WATCHING BIRDS

Processing the images! It is a time consuming business, especially if needed for prints or publication. The resuscitation business still keeps me pretty busy.

ESSENTIAL BIRDING ACCESSORY

For me, a big telephoto lens - you cannot beat an image to identify and record a bird.

EARLIEST BIRDING MEMORIES

Having the nests of birds (in retrospect almost certainly corvids) pointed out to me at a very young age when walking in the countryside.



Breeding status of rare birds in Herefordshire

The Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) was formed in 1972 by representatives of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the British Trust for Ornithology, The Nature Conservancy Council and the journal British Birds. The present Panel comprises representatives of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, RSPB, BTO, three independent members, and a Secretary. The panel collects breeding data on the rarer species of birds that breed in the United Kingdom. In particular, its records allow the production of annual totals of breeding pairs for each species on its list. Detailed information about the panel and the species concerned is available on its website <http://www.rbbp.org.uk>.

Every year HOC submit a report to RBBP based on the records submitted by its members. Although more than one hundred regular or occasional breeding birds are included in panel's annual report, relatively few breed in Herefordshire. The principal species concerned are Peregrine Falcon, Northern Goshawk, Hobby, Little Ringed Plover, Water Rail, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and Willow Tit.

It is easy to record information about breeding in BirdTrack so please use this facility to ensure that your records contribute to the RBBP report. On the casual records entry page in the blue bar there is a field called Breeding Status. The appropriate breeding code can be selected from the drop-down list in the box immediately below. As an example, suppose you had seen a fledgling little ringed plover you would select the code FL (recently FLedged) from the drop down list. There is also a small *i* (information) logo beside the breeding status and by hovering your cursor over this, a box containing the 19 breeding codes appears. For the species mentioned, the breeding season is defined as March 1st to June 30th. Any data recorded about sensitive or rare species on Birdtrack during the breeding season is *not visible to anyone except the person posting the record and ourselves*, so there is no risk that information might reach the wrong hands.

For each record, the evidence for breeding is graded into one of three categories: Possible, Probable or Confirmed. The grading is based on the strength of evidence - a singing male in the breeding season in suitable habitat would be coded H - a possible breeder. A Nest containing Eggs (coded NE) would constitute confirmed breeding. A full explanation is given on the RBBP website and we would be happy to answer any questions not covered. It is still possible to record information about breeding behaviour in the comments section, but by completing the breeding status box it is very much easier to select the appropriate data for reports.

It is not only information about the scarcer and rare birds that is important. Data about the breeding status of every species is vital for all the reports, surveys and requests for information about the birds in the county, so please include this on all records made during the breeding season.

Mick Colquhoun
County recorder

Chris Robinson
Data manager

HOC Field Meetings 2016 - February - July 2016

February 18th Thursday Forest of Dean

Meet at Speech House car park (SO 623:123) at 9.30am. The car park is the one on the opposite side of the road (B4226) from the Speech House. We will be looking for crossbill, hawfinch, woodcock, snipe and goshawk and a decent slice of good luck to help in finding them. Reasonably easy walking through mixed woodland and cleared forestry areas with some moderate slopes. Bring waterproof footwear and clothing. Lunch in cars. No dogs please. Would participants please contact the leader beforehand if weather conditions are inclement.

Leader: Gerald Parker (tel: 01432 760023)

March 19th Saturday Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Llanelli

Meet at the National Wetlands Centre car park (SS 532:987), postcode SA14 9SH at 10am. Follow the duck signs from exit 48 off the M4 motorway. Take the A4138 towards Llanelli and then the A484 eastwards heading back to Swansea. At the next roundabout look for and follow the duck sign towards the destination. WWT members have free access, non-members pay an admission fee. Good paths and many hides to visit. Warm and waterproof clothing essential. Lunch in cafe or cars. No dogs please. Good for waders, ducks, egrets and spoonbills with always a possibility of something special dropping in. Please contact the leader prior to setting out in case of inclement weather.

Leader: Gerald Parker (tel: 01432 760023)

April 14th Thursday Talybont Reservoir and Llangorse Lake

Meet at the north end of the dam (SO 104:205) at 10am. We propose to take a walk along the road at the side of the dam looking for woodland and waterbirds with the possibility of dipper. Afterwards, we will travel to Llangorse Lake to park near Llangasty - Tallylyn Church (SO 133:261) where lunch will be eaten in cars followed by a walk alongside the lake. The morning walk will be easy and the afternoon will have minor gradients but will possibly be wet in places so waterproof footwear is essential. No dogs please. Please contact the leader if unsuitable weather conditions prevail.

Leader: Gerald Parker (tel: 01432 760023)

May 5th Thursday Olchon Valley

Meet at the Darrens car park (SO 298:299) at 9.00am. We will walk up the small rocky valley looking for ring ouzels and other spring migrants. Following this, we will drive to and park at the ford where lunch will be eaten. Afterwards we will visit various locations along the valley looking out for any migrants that may turn up. We will finish at Clodock Church to look for dippers along the river Monnow. Steep gradients in places, waterproof footwear essential. No dogs please.

Leader: John Pullen (tel: 01600 750266)

May 18th Wednesday Lea and Pagets Wood Morning only

Meet at Hereford Wildlife Trust reserve (SO 598:343) at 9.00am. Parking is limited so please contact the leader if attending. Directions - from Fownhope church take the B4224 S/E up a steep hill for ¼ mile. At the top take the side road to the left and continue for ½ mile to a field gate on the right by a disused stone building. Enter the field between the disused building and the entrance to a private drive and follow track to a wide gate into the wood. Park on the road, 100m further on, just past the footpath sign with no one driving down the private drive. No dogs please.

Leader: John Pullen (tel: 01600 750266)

May 21st Saturday Cotswold Water Park

Meet at 9.30 am just off the A 419 at the Cotswold Visitor Centre (SU 072:970) (GL7 5TL) before we move off in convoy to other locations around this large expansive area of worked gravel pits. It will involve flat easy walks and short stops to some of the various pits which can be muddy in places. We should have plenty of spring/summer migrants and waterfowl to see and hear at this stage of the month. Travel time from Hereford is approximately 1½ hours. No dogs please and we are likely to carry lunch. Please let the leader know if you are coming so we can car share where possible.

Leader: Nick Smith (tel:07831 730676)

June 4th Saturday Madley BT MESC Nature Reserve and surrounding area

Meet at 8.30am in car park (SO 422:376) inside the gatehouse for a visit to a nature reserve that has been created on-site. There is a possibility of a good variety of breeding birds to be found here. Afterwards at approximately 11.30am we will drive to Honeymoon Common (SO 439:383) where we will park at the roadside where lunch will be consumed, then followed by a walk around the common and surrounding area. No dogs please, relatively easy walking.

Leader: Geoff Davis. (tel 01981 251355)

June 21st Tuesday HOC contribution to Herefordshire Walking Festival - Aylestone Country Park

Meet at Aylestone Country Park (SO 523:416) at 7.00am off the A465 Hereford to Worcester road. A walk of about 3½ miles through the Country Park across the Lugg meadows, along the river and surrounding area. Expected finish 11.00 am. No dogs please. Non HOC members will need to book for this meeting.

For more details, email: walking@walkingfestival.com or contact us by post

Herefordshire Walking Festival

7 St Ethelbert Street

Hereford. HR1 2NR

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

July 21st Thursday Mary Knoll Valley and High Vinnals

Meet at Forestry Commission picnic area and car park (SO 474:730) at 9.30am on the Wigmore to Ludlow road and on the right hand side some 4½ miles from Wigmore. Wooded valleys and hills interspersed with small meadows. Good variety of birds with a possibility of a rarity or two if lucky. Stout footwear recommended. Reasonable walking with medium to high gradients in places. Carry lunch. No dogs please.

Leader: Gerald Parker (tel 01432 760023)

NO MEETING DURING AUGUST

HOC Annual trip, Minsmere etc, Suffolk. October 2016

NOW FULLY BOOKED!!!

HOC INDOOR MEETINGS PROGRAMME SPRING 2016

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 fee of £2 per member, £3 per non-member, includes refreshments.

February 11th Stephanie Tyler "Dippers"
March 10th AGM & Dutch Supper. Members Contributions



Little egret. Taken by Mick Colquhoun

HOC Field Meeting Reports

Rotherwas and Lower Bullingham area 22nd October 2015

Leader: Gerald Parker

When a new location for an outdoor meeting is arranged it is always a gamble. Will it be suitable? Are there any birds around? Will people find it ok? Anyway, as things turned out my concerns were unfounded. At the designated time 22 members assembled at the specified location. The morning was dry with good visibility and immediately a robin could be heard singing above the nearby traffic noise. A dunnock was singing from a nearby hedge and wood pigeon, carrion crow and pied wagtails were in a field where a potato crop had been harvested.

Looking up towards Dinedor Hill there were good numbers of rooks and jackdaws displaying by tumbling and soaring in the breeze and a pair of ravens were also getting in on the act, just for the fun of it. A pair of buzzards having decided we were getting too close, took to the wing and flapped lazily over the trees and away from us.

A stock dove flew over and jays were heard screeching nearby, a keen eyed observer noted a sparrowhawk soaring overhead which soon attracted the attention of some of the nearby corvid population. It obviously decided that discretion was the better part of valour and moved away. A harsh rattle indicated the presence of a mistle thrush and we overhead a small party of redwings together with a few fieldfares were flying westwards. A movement in a nearby bush caught our attention which

turned out to be a goldcrest foraging amongst the leaves and giving everyone good views as it did so. The remains of a grass snake were discovered as we walked through the orchard, leaving us to ponder on the reason of its demise.

Having eaten our lunch back at the cars the afternoon activities were discussed and it was decided to move the cars and park them within the Rotherwas business park and walk along the cycle path towards the new footbridge. Here we found a good selection of birds comprising starlings, skylark, a flock of goldfinches, meadow pipit, linnets and a lesser redpoll. A heron and some black-headed gulls were on a nearby field that had been sown with grass seed. The River Wye produced a few new species which were mute swan, mallard, moorhen, goosander, little grebe and a brief view of a kingfisher as it sped across the river.

Walking back to the cars it was decided that everyone had enjoyed the day even if the species tally was a little low with a final total of 42 being found.

Many thanks to all who attended.

Holme Lacy 10th November 2015

Leader: Tony Eveleigh

23 members gathered at Holme Lacy Church and we soon arrived at the riverbank after seeing a grey heron and heard an early skylark singing overhead.

Further along the footpath a nice gathering of birds were observed. A peregrine was seen high in the sky and then dived down towards the church. A kingfisher was also calling, a mandarin duck flew downstream, a tit flock passed through the trees including several long-tailed tits, great tit, blue tit and two treecreepers. Five common buzzards were seen flying over Cherry Hill.

When approaching the fishing hut, one of our members spotted another kingfisher fly into a stand of saplings. Eventually, after much searching the bird was found and was seen with telescopes, low in the vegetation waiting to dive for prey.

We then walked up the old railway line into the village and two members spotted a brambling. Good flocks of fieldfare and redwing were in the adjacent orchard.

As we passed the ponds at the rear of Holme Lacy House four lesser redpoll were seen and five coots were on the upper pond.

We all enjoyed the mild calm autumn weather unlike the previous day, 50 species were seen in total.

Haugh Wood and Hampton Bishop area 9th December

Leader: Gerald Parker.

The car park at Haugh Wood gradually filled with HOC members on a cool breezy December morning and following the usual pleasantries, 16 of us set off along the NW track. Everything was quiet and very little sign of bird life at first, although as everyone agreed a joy to be out in this lovely woodland.

Gradually all of the usual species introduced themselves with great tit, robin, coal tit, wren and wood pigeon being noted. Squelching slowly along a muddy track a few of the group spotted a small deer as it crossed the path, probably a Muntjac. Soon we passed some cottages and as there were fruit trees in the garden, there is always a possibility of bullfinches, and sure enough, first the call then three of them were spotted in nearby trees.

Although the light was reasonably good compared with the gloomy days we recently have had there was hardly any movement around us. Some rooks and jackdaws were pitching and diving above the tree line and a raven flew over giving us a cursory honk as it went by.

A little owl was heard in a nearby orchard, some redwings passed by and a buzzard flapped lazily away towards Common Hill.

Some long-tailed tits were hopping around overhead, their clicking/buzzing contact calls giving them away and goldcrests were spotted exploring the top branches of some conifers - always a joy to see these tiny birds as they methodically search for food.

A group of five siskins flew over, there seem to be very few around at present. This is possibly due to evidence of a light cone harvest of their favourite food, larch alder and silver birch this year. Nearby a nuthatch was heard, and a slight movement on the trunk of a large tree revealed the presence of a tree creeper as it quietly moved around searching all the nooks and crannies for any unwary insects that might be still around.

There is a well-known saying that, "The best is yet to come" and although it often doesn't happen in this case it did, thanks to a hawk-eyed member of the group who cried out lesser spotted woodpecker and sure enough there it was, a male which gave everyone good views of itself as it moved around, high up in an ash tree, quite oblivious to us, I think possibly a first for one of the group. Just to pile on the agony a little further on the same person found a pair of marsh tits, two first rate species, thank you Jim!

Emerging from the wood we ventured onto Broadmoor Common where mistle thrush, house sparrow, goldfinch and fieldfare were found.

After lunch the group moved to Hampton Bishop for a walk near the River Lugg, although swollen and fast flowing the river was below bank height, here we found grey heron, buzzard, goosander and a large flock comprising fieldfare, redwing and some starlings. Unfortunately no waders were found in the many pools of floodwater in the meadows. A cormorant flew over, a sparrowhawk was spotted briefly and a kingfisher darted across in front of us, as we walked back to the cars a skylark was heard in a nearby field.

A grand total of 49 species were found from both locations and a big thank you to all who attended.



Black Redstart at Hereford Cathedral. Picture taken by John Tilby

HOC SIGHTING HIGHLIGHTS

October - December 2015 Compiled by John Tilby

During the three months up until 31st December 2015, the following notable birds have been recorded in the county:

Date	Bird	Number	Site	Observer
24.11.2015	Whooper swan	10	Clifford	P Jennings
24.12.2015	Whooper swan	1	Ivington	P Downes
03.10.2015	Garganey	1	BGP	P Downes
13.10.2015	Garganey	5	BGP	J Conlon
18.10.2015	Garganey	1	Kenchester pools	S Coney
26.12.2015	Red-crested pochard	1	WGP	P & T Downes
14.10.2015	Common scoter	1	Hartleton	A Eveleigh
01.11.2015	Golden plover	1	Milton Cross	P Downes
07.11.2015	Golden plover	155	South of city	J Tilby
10.10.2015	Mediterranean gull	1	BGP	P & T Downes
27.12.2015	Mediterranean gull	1	BGP	G Bilboa
10.10.2015	Yellow-legged gull	1	BGP	P & T Downes
18.10.2015	Yellow-legged gull	2	BGP	P & T Downes
24.12.2015	Yellow-legged gull	1	Ivington	P Downes
18.10.2015	Great black-backed gull	2	BGP	P & T Downes
16.10.2015	Caspian gull	2	WGP	G Bilboa
15.11.2015	Caspian gull	1	BGP	P Downes
25.10.2015	Caspian gull	1	WGP	G Bilboa
08.12.2015	Long-eared owl	1	NW Herefordshire	P Downes
28.10.2015	Short-eared owl	1	South Herefordshire	J.R Pullen
24.11.2015	Short-eared owl	2	Clifford	P Jennings
23.12.2015	Short-eared owl (dead)	1	WGP	E Q-Ashman
08.10.2015	Hoopoe	1	BGP	G Bilboa
10.10.2015	Hoopoe	1	Whitney-on-Wye	via Birdguides
13.11.2015	Black redstart	1	Hereford Arts College	I Jones

Date	Bird	Number	Site	Observer
21.11.2015	Black redstart	1	Hereford cathedral	J Tilby
07.11.2015	Siberian chiffchaff	1	WGP	P & T Downes
06.12.2015	Great grey shrike	1	Near the Sturts	Visitor
16.11.2015	Mealy redpoll	2	Eaton Bishop	M Bailey

WGP = Wellington Gravel Pits

BGP = Brockhall Gravel Pits

Other sightings

Fieldfare and **Redwing** arrived in number during October

Water rail were back on Wellington GP on 3/10/15 (P Downes)

Brambling have been observed at various locations across the county

A late **Swallow** at Stocklow on 3/11/2015 (P Jennings)

Hawfinch (3) at The Doward 10/11/2015 (I Draycott)

Black-tailed godwit at Brockhall 11/12/2015 (G Bilboa)

Goshawk at Leintwardine on 10/10/15 (NP Betts)

Harrier species (probably **Hen harrier**) Upper Kinsham 9/12/2015 (P Downes)



Image by Nick Smith

House Martin Nest Study 2016 by Chris Robinson

Thanks to all of you who took part in the House Martin counting survey in 2015, we managed to cover all 47 1km squares assigned to Herefordshire BTO region – good work! The House Martin survey continues in 2016 but this year will involve volunteers making regular observations at individual nests to collect information about nesting activity.

The 2016 nest study has different aims from the 2015 count survey and so is NOT restricted to 'random' pre-selected survey squares. Instead, you can select your own study site anywhere where House Martins are nesting.

The study is therefore ideal for observers who have nests on their home or place of work. Volunteers are needed to observe one or more nests regularly through the whole breeding season, i.e. from April to September, or exceptionally into early October. You do **not** need to be able to climb ladders to look inside the nests! Your observations made from ground level (or from a window) will enable BTO to compare factors such as egg laying dates and breeding success at different sites across the UK.

Ideally, you need to be able to observe the nests for just a few minutes at least once a week to record any activity seen. If you are able to watch the nest more frequently, this will provide even more powerful information and make more accurate estimates of the egg laying dates and the length of time before the young birds fledge.

You can register your interest in taking part by going to www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/house-martin-survey/house-martin-nest-study-2016 or contact me (details below). If you don't have easily observable House Martins nesting near you I also have a leaflet which you might like to give to family, friends or neighbours who have. Please ask me for one.

Chris Robinson
Tel: 01981 510360
Email: herefordbtorep@btinternet.com



Peregrine. Taken by Mick Colquhoun

Snippet no. 11 ROBINS – Territory. Display. Aggression.

By Guy Woodford

To the best of my knowledge robins are unique among British songbirds in that they are territorial throughout the year. After the joint task of bringing up young, the cock and hen retire to separate corners of the breeding territory to start the annual moult. After this all adults and juveniles compete to carve out their winter quarters; more accurately their autumn territories, because most robins pair in January and some as early as December. This twice a year switch-around means that within a lifetime a robin will have a number of homes. Loss of a mate may mean a new start in a new patch and many robins choose autumn territories unrelated and well away from their spring and summer breeding space.

The business of carving out and defending one or more territories is crucial to a robin's survival. Conflict is inevitable but all-out fight is to be avoided. In serious battle even the victor, if wounded, becomes a victim. As with mammals and other birds, robins have adopted strategies and postures to offset real damage.

The first line of defence is song. Robin's song is famous for its beauty and complexity. In snippet no. 6, I cited J C Bremond's research which confirmed its astronomical permutations. But for every robin that sings (male or female) there is another that sings little or not at all, an anomaly I cannot explain.

Next in defence are the cross-border *little sounds* I described in snippet no. 7. Here robins watch each other over a short distance but within their separate territories, so just a friendly warning.

When one crosses the border the territory holder may add another sound, the long note. This extended *tseeee* has even to our ears a hint of complaint. At this same early stage there are two visual signs of nervousness: a raising of the crown and fanning of the tail, each specific to a certain context. If both robins are stationary on a branch or nearby, the more nervous bird will betray its fear as its olive-brown crown feathers rise and fall and rise again, often many times. If the two are flying around each other on a flurry of stops and starts, both tails will be fully spread.

One feature of the next two stages is that the robins tend to look like automata, taking on fixed positions and mechanical movements. First comes the classic robin **threat posture**. There are variants when the birds are perched at different heights. But if the rivals are on the same level it is at its most obvious to the observer. Both birds thrust their beaks sharply upwards and less dramatically raise the tail. The usual explanation (Chris Mead and others) is that the puffing out of the breast feathers will create the 'maximum amount of red plumage'. I question this for several reasons but mostly because the breast feathers are orange at the tip only; behind they are a dull dark grey. Puff up the breast and you dilute the orange with streaks of this dull dark grey. My theory, and there is no proof, is that the robin is using size rather than colour as its weapon of threat.

Continued..

Next comes the robin's last ditch stand before all-out battle. But, almost always battle is deflected with one party or the other retreating. Often accompanied by *squeezed sounds*, a more urgent version of the earlier *little sounds*, the rivals move on to **lateral sway**. Here the robins adopt a more exaggerated upwards stretch with beak and tail near vertical and with legs fixed, they sway or pivot from side to side. In his "*Life of the Robin*", David Lack called this posturing 'breast waving', a rather genteel description of a fixed mechanical movement where feet act as an anchor and the body rotates a few degrees to right and left.

On one occasion, alerted by sustained *squeeze sounds*, I witnessed four robins (two pairs) all performing this lateral sway, an unusual sight; 'unusual' because at each stage of posturing one party may adopt another pose. Less obvious to the human observer, but equally as threatening. **It freezes but with neck, head and beak thrust slightly forward as if about to attack.**

Love Birds? by Caroline Hanks

Then we want you to get involved in the **Big Farmland Bird Count!** We are looking for farmers and keen birdwatchers to get involved with this year's count which runs from **6th - 14th February 2016.**

The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust's 2016 Big Farmland Bird Count is a key way we can assist with monitoring bird populations in the county. We are hoping to match-make (well, it is happening on Valentine's week!) farmers and landowners with birders to help us make this count as effective as possible.

Farmland is a vital wildlife habitat and we are working with local and national organisations Herefordshire Ornithological Club, Campaign for the Farmed Environment, Wiggly Wigglers and Farm Herefordshire, to continue to work closely with farmers and highlight their ongoing work to reverse the decline in farmland bird numbers.

So, whether you've got some birds for us to count, or just love birds and would like to help us count them, contact HWT's Ecologist Sophie Cowling on **01432 356 872** or CFE's Caroline Hanks on **01981 251019** and get involved!

ADVERTISING IN HOC NEWS:

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.

Commercial advertising rates are: 1/2 page £15 & full page £30 per issue, four consecutive issues for the price of three. Supplied single page loose insert £20 per issue.

Position of advert at editor's discretion. HOC does not necessarily endorse products or services advertised in its publications. Please mention this publication when replying to advertisements.

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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.

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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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