

HOC NEWS

quarterly bulletin for herefordshire birdwatchers

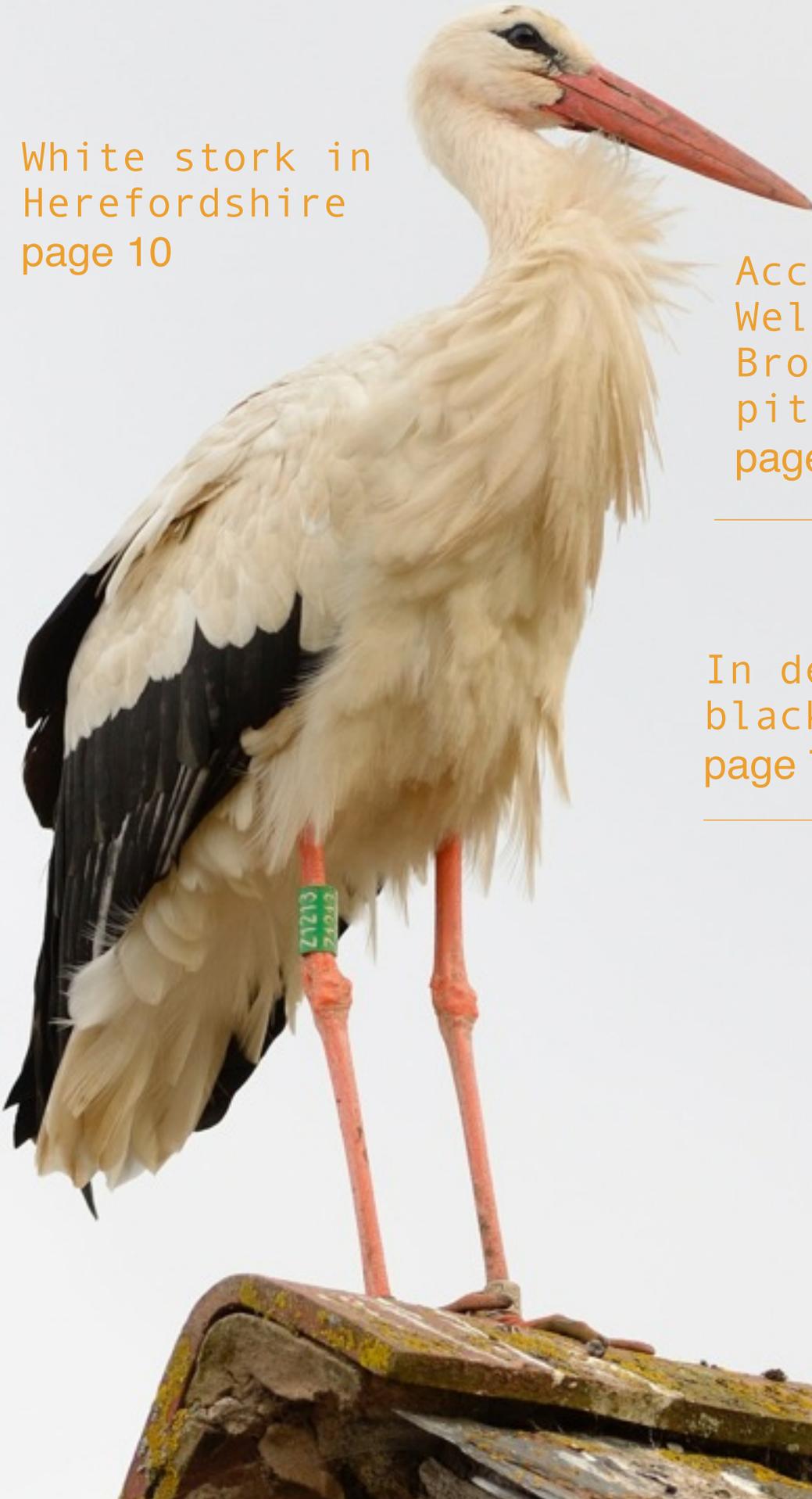
238

August 2016

White stork in
Herefordshire
page 10

Access to
Wellington and
Brockhall gravel
pits
page 4

In defence of the
black rat
page 7



Editorial

by Nicky Davies

Hello - and welcome to the August 2016 edition of the HOC newsletter. I have been struggling to fit everything into this edition, as our local members have been exceedingly busy sending in reports, short stories, photographs, pleas, diary dates..... A feature has been submitted by the club on page 4 providing information on access to two of the county's top birding spots - Brockhall and Wellington gravel pits. This information is very important so please take a look.

We have been sent a couple of short stories by members - I had a 'laugh out loud' moment after reading "too early - too late" by Geoff Davis (page 10) and it's always good to hear people's memoirs of seeing birds in the UK and overseas, thank you Norma Forrest!

Please take a moment to read Treasurers Jottings - Jim is asking members to be aware of an upcoming questionnaire. If you are able to help, please contact Jim directly and he will send you a copy of the questionnaire. The more the merrier.

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 not a Facebook fan yet, please 'Like' us on our page for latest news and photographs.

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

Happy birding!

Nicky



Nick Smith after being awarded his BEM by Lady Darnley. Picture by Una Morgan

From our Secretary

Wanted! An Organiser for HOC away trips. Chris and Pam Bartlett are standing down after this year's trip. Anyone interested could contact me.

Also, do you know of any good speakers for our Indoor meetings in 2017-18? All suggestions gratefully received.

Many thanks,
Una Morgan

Contents

Editorial	2
Notes from the Chair	3
Access to Wellington and Brockhall gravel pits	4
Robins Snippet no.12	5
Sightings of note	6
In defence of the black rat!	7
Desert Island Birder	8
Indoor meetings diary (Sept 2016 - Feb 2017)	8
HOC field meetings	9
A short story by Geoff Davis	10
Field meeting reports	11
Treasurers jottings	13
White stork in Herefordshire	14
Spring had sprung.....	15
Advertising/Submissions/Contacts	16

Notes from the Chair by Gerald Wells

What do you want from your county bird club? Is your Committee steering the HOC in the right direction? As indicated in Treasurer's Jottings we hope in the very near future to seek answers to these and many similar questions in a membership questionnaire to find out what you require. This is an online painless box ticking exercise which we will launch in September so please fill it in and let us know your thoughts. Our Newsletter editor, Nicky Davies is to be congratulated on a recent significant academic achievement. Nicky has just been awarded an MSc in Environment and Conservation Management from the University of South Wales. Her dissertation was on Phytophthora in alder trees along the river Wye and Lugg – the extent of the pathogen, impacts on the riparian zone and how to manage infected trees. This is an important contribution to research in the field of conservation and will be very relevant to the HWT Lugg Valley Project.

Talking of which, the HWT have a further project within this concentrating on the wetland areas associated with the River Lugg and, under the title of the "Lugg Wetland Gems", have ambitions for environmental improvements for wildlife to the Wellington gravel pits and Bodenham Lake sites. We have given our support and contributed data on the bird records for the sites and we look forward to collaborating with HWT on this exciting venture.

Our sub-committees have been working hard: the 2015 Annual report is on track, the Rarities sub-committee is reviewing the county bird list in view of information that came to light recently from scrutiny of museum specimens and critical analyses of historical records and, thanks to Nick Smith, a substantial number of past bird records in paper form have been catalogued for archiving.

That's all for now, but as we approach a "quiet" time for birding activities, don't forget to keep submitting those BirdTrack records, including evidence of breeding. This can bring new challenges for identification skills of juveniles, as I have just been reminded by a recently fledged Redstart hanging around the garden.

Access to Wellington and Brockhall Gravel Pits

These gravel pits are two of the most important birding sites in the county and, after a number of requests, these instructions were emailed to HOC members a few weeks ago. We are publishing them again for the benefit of non-email members (and with a couple of highlighted changes to the original)

Wellington

Access to the site is by the public footpath that runs from the A49 at SO500478, proceeding **east** to join the minor road to Marden at SO515478. Parking is usually possible in the lay-by on the A49 opposite the start. From here the path runs through the centre of the area, initially passing to the north of the new workings, **the fly fishing pit and then to the north of the main pit**; 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). Leave the car park via the obvious gate and follow the footpath south to join the public footpath at the hide. *(There is no longer any need to sign in).*

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.

Brockhall (SO451423)

Access to Brockhall GP is just off the A438 Brecon road, west from Hereford. Park in the layby at SO453419, opposite derelict Pub/Indian restaurant, about a mile and a half past Wyevale Garden Centre (coming from Hereford).

Cross the road and walk to the left, taking the right fork down a slope. After 70yds there is a public footpath on the right between the houses which leads eventually to the Gravel Pits. **It is possible to walk all around the water but please keep well away from the water's edge.**



House Martin by Tony Welch

ROBINS - A story of bigamy. Snippet number 12

by Guy Woodford

In a previous article I suggested that, but for a separation in the autumn, robins stay with the one partner for life. A replacement is sought only if one of the pair dies. Bigamy is rare. In late January as expected our home robin teamed up with his hen of last year. The pairing process moved from reticence to acceptance over two days, the 24th and the 25th.

We have a large garden which includes the old farm pond in its south west section. The male's autumn territory abuts the house and spans part of the former farmyard, a walled courtyard and the nut garden spreading out to the east. Hers is the whole of the middle of the garden down the north edge of the pond. The two birds are easily recognised (see snippet no. 4) and bear the names 'Person' and 'Midway'. Once paired the two territories form one for the business of breeding, due to start some two months later.

However as that time approached Person began to take interest in a younger hen in a neighbouring garden. I dubbed her 'Hoverer' and she still lives up to that name. I first took note of this second relationship in early April. On April 7th I wrote... "so it is looking as if Person is two timing midway but not seriously". Within days the last bit proved wrong. By now Hoverer had taken over a territory adjoining Person's including the other half of the former farmyard.

As early as April 13th Person was courtship feeding both hens. Both had built their first nests but Midway's did not survive, found on the ground torn apart 10 days or so later. Hoverer's was in a plastic sack of kindling in my neighbours' open shed, formerly part of the foldyard. They hatched on May 6th and fledged on the 18th. Midway's second attempt, the nest high up under the pentice roof in the courtyard, hatched on June 1st and fledged on the 13th, the same day as Hoverer's second clutch hatched, this nest again in the open shed but further west (the hen invariably builds a new nest for each brood). Even with this overlap, Person solidly fed the offspring of both wives. At the time of writing, July 10th, 16 days after the third and last lot left the nest, he is still eagerly feeding the fledglings, even though well into the moult, scruffy in appearance, mottled below, with two gaps in his wing feathers, the primaries and secondaries being shed in sequence, and only one tail feather hanging on, the new ones mere stubs not yet visible. Each hen fed her own offspring but not the other's and judging by the abundance of their calls most, if not all, fledglings survived through the period of dependency.

Relations between the three adults have been carefully watched: Person has been at ease throughout. The two hens have had minor skirmishes. In general it has been a mixture, moments of anger and longer periods of tolerance.

In the last week or so, Hoverer and her fledglings have been in the nut garden, the very heart of Midway's home territory. Rather than driving them out, she has been in the bubble of her own, deeper into the moult she is tailless, very mottled and 'boat shaped'. At this stage the pull of territory is at its lowest ebb.

David Lack and Chris Mead have both described robin excursions into bigamy mostly with mishaps, this is an unexpected success story.

SIGHTINGS OF NOTE April - June 2016

Compiled by John Tilby

BGP - Brockhall Gravel Pits

WGP - Wellington Gravel Pits

DATE	RARITY SIGHTING	NUMBER	LOCATION	OBSERVER
03.04.2016	REDSHANK	1	WGP	J.TILBY & N.PEGLER
04.04.2016	RING OUZEL	6	GARWAY HILL	A.EVELEIGH & J.PULLEN
04.04.2016	GREAT GREY SHRIKE	1	GARWAY HILL	M.BAILEY
04.04.2016	HAWFINCH	1	GARWAY HILL	J.TILBY & N.PEGLER
05.04.2016	BRAMBLING	1	WOLF COTTAGE	B.WILDER
05.04.2016	HAWFINCH	8	GARWAY HILL	I.JONES
06.04.2016	TREE SPARROW	2	PEDWARDINE FARM	P.DOWNES
09.04.2016	GARGANEY	1	WALFORD	J.R.BECK
10.04.2016	RING OUZEL	1	RED DARREN	E.Q.ASHMAN
11.04.2016	LITTLE GULL	3	BGP	P.DOWNES
11.04.2016	SANDWICH TERN	1	BGP	P.DOWNES
12.04.2016	SANDWICH TERN	2	BGP	C.JONES
13.04.2016	RED GROUSE	2	HATTERALL HILL	A.EVELEIGH & J.PULLEN
14.04.2014	LITTLE GULL	2 (1S)	BGP	M.COLQUHOUN
15.04.2016	OSPREY	1	STOCKLOW MANOR	P.JENNINGS
16.04.2016	YELLOW-LEGGED GULL	1	BGP	J.TILBY
19.04.2016	CASPIAN GULL	1	BGP	G.BILBAO
20.04.2016	GRASSHOPPER WARBLER	1	STOCKLOW MANOR	P.JENNINGS
23.04.2016	BLACK-TAILED GODWIT	1	BGP	J.TILBY
24.04.2016	YELLOW-LEGGED GULL	1	BGP	P.DOWNES
25.04.2016	MEDITERRANEAN GULL	1	BGP	G.BILBAO
27.04.2016	GREY PARTRIDGE	1	VOWCHURCH	I.J.BUTTRISS
28.04.2016	WHIMBREL	2	BGP	G.BILBAO
29.04.2016	MEALY REDPOLL	6	STAUNTON-ON-ARROW	P.JENNINGS
03.05.2016	SANDERLING	1	WGP	G.BILBAO
06.05.2016	WOOD SANDPIPER	1	BGP	J.TILBY
07.05.2016	REDSHANK	2	BGP	J.TILBY
09.05.2016	RUFF	1	BGP	J.TILBY
10.05.2016	LITTLE TERN	3	BGP	P.DOWNES
10.05.2016	BLACK TERN	1	BGP	P.DOWNES
10.05.2016	WHIMBREL	1	BGP	P.DOWNES
10.05.2016	CURLEW SANDPIPER	1	BGP	J.TILBY

DATE	RARITY SIGHTING	NUMBER	LOCATION	OBSERVER
10.05.2016	SANDERLING	9	BGP	P&T.DOWNES
11.05.2016	SHORT-EARED OWL	1	STOCKLOW MANOR	P.JENNINGS
11.05.2016	OSPREY	1	STRANGFORD	I.J.BUTTRISS
11.05.2016	LITTLE STINT	1	BGP	P&T.DOWNES
11.05.2016	TURNSTONE	1	BGP	P&T.DOWNES
11.05.2016	SANDERLING	5	BGP	P&T.DOWNES
12.05.2016	BLACK-NECKED GREBE	2	BGP	G.BILBAO
12.05.2016	BLACK TERN	1	BGP	T.DOWNES
12.05.2016	OSPREY	1	BGP	J.NEWTON
17.05.2016	GOLDEN ORIOLE	1	PETERSTOW	L.ARUNDEL
26.05.2016	QUAIL	1	STOCKLOW MANOR	P.JENNINGS
28.05.2016	RUFF	2	BGP	J.TILBY
04.06.2016	AVOCET	1	BGP	R.STEAD
05.06.2016	GARGANEY	1	BGP	G.BILBAO
06.06.2016	MEDITERRANEAN GULL	1	BGP	P.DOWNES
11.06.2016	RUFF	1	BGP	P.DOWNES
17.06.2016	CASPIAN GULL	1	BGP	G.BILBAO
17.06.2016	QUAIL	1	LEINTWARDINE	M.BAILEY
21.06.2016	KITTIWAKE	1	BGP	G.BILBAO

In defence of the black rat by Graham J.Wren

The black rat *Rattus rattus* originated from India and arrived in the UK with the Romans some 2,000 years ago. Some say the fleas carried by the black rat brought back from the crusades during the middle ages were the source of the 1348-53 Black Death which killed 3 million people in England, more than half of the population at the time.

Originating in China the brown rat *Rattus norvegicus* arrived in the UK in 1730 from the Baltic and quickly displaced the smaller black rat.

While highly commending the efforts made by organisations and individuals in eradicating the brown rat from the islands of Handa, Canna and Ailsa Craig, thus protecting the breeding seabird populations from predation, I fail to understand why the RSPB is spending over £1 million in a scheme to remove the black rat from the Shiant, their last UK stronghold in order to protect the resident puffins *Fratercula arctica* which are showing no significant symptoms of decline.

For those of you who watched the recent programmes on BBC4 re our declining seabird populations, you will be aware that the threat to the food supply is the greatest concern for our seabirds, with the exception of the gannet *Morus bassana* perhaps.

The RSPB is endeavouring to eradicate a species from our islands that qualifies more as a native along with the rabbit which was also brought here by the Romans, than the brown rat. Is this really what conservation is all about? Control yes, but not eradication.

DESERT ISLAND BIRDER

NAME & HOC POSITION

Brian Willder, Vice President

FAVOURITE BIRD AND WHY

Swallow, because it heralds summer.

FAVOURITE BIRDING PATCH IN HEREFORDSHIRE

Homend Estate because it is home and I have lived & worked here for 46 years.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO BIRDWATCHING?

As a boy living in the country, nature was always interesting and I was no good at sport!

WHAT DO YOU GET UP TO WHEN NOT WATCHING BIRDS

Botany and local history

ESSENTIAL BIRDING ACCESSORY

Binoculars

EARLIEST BIRDING MEMORIES

Finding a hoopoe in Leicestershire and having to persuade the librarian to let me into the adult section to find a book to identify the bird.



Brian with some excellent reading material!

HOC INDOOR MEETINGS PROGRAMME TO SPRING 2017

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

Sept 8th - Bob Silverwood - 'Herefordshire's National Nature Reserves'

Oct 13th - Paul Denning 'Wildlife of Glamorgan'

Nov 10th - Oliver Smart from 60 degrees North

Dec 11th - Ashley Grove 'Shetland to Scilly'

Jan 12th - Graham Wren '40 years birding on the Farne Islands'

Feb 11th - Dave Leech (BTO staff) 'Reed warblers'

HOC Field Meetings 2016 – September - December

The Weir Gardens, Kenchester and surrounding area

September 15th Thursday

Meet at the National Trust Weir Gardens car park (SO 437:419) at 9.30am. The site is located on the left hand side of the A438 heading westwards at Kenchester. Would members please have their membership cards to hand as the National Trust have kindly waived the admission charge to non members, however a donation to the trust will be gratefully received. The walk will proceed through the grounds which run alongside the river Wye and offer good views overlooking the river. The site has a mixture of hardwoods with some conifers giving a varied habitat for birds. Lunch will be eaten in cars at the car park. Afterwards we propose to walk downstream following the river to where the outfall for the Yazor brook flood defence scheme is located. If time allows it is hoped we will pay a visit to nearby Kenchester pools to round off the day. Fairly easy walking, no dogs please.

Leader: Mervyn Davies. (tel 01981 590298)

Annual away club trip. RSPB Minsmere

October 3-7th

River Wye and Holme Lacy

October 12th Wednesday

Meet at Holme Lacy church (SO 567:347) at 9.30am to look for autumn migrants along a section of the River Wye. Easy walking with slight to moderate gradients, possibly muddy in places. Distance involved could vary from two to four miles depending upon the route selected and prevailing conditions. Could participants please contact the leader beforehand if weather is inclement, carry lunch, no dogs please.

Leader: Tony Eveleigh (tel: 01989 750297)

Yarkhill Monkhide and Homend walk

October 27th Thursday

Meet at Yarkhill church (SO 608:427) at 9.30am for a walk through mixed farmland looking for late summer or early wintering birds, with a little local background of local history thrown in. The walk will be a steady uphill gradient to the halfway point at Newtown Cross where there is a pub and garage, both with toilets and refreshments. From here the walking is mainly downhill back to the beginning where lunch can be consumed. Afterwards we can visit Homend Park which is close by. No dogs please.

Leader: Brian Willder (tel: 01531 670404)

Wellington GP and Bodenham Lake

November 20th Sunday

Meet in the layby on the A49 near the Almshouses at Wellington (SO500:577) at 9.30am. **(NOT THE MAIN ENTRANCE)** Parking is fairly limited here so please contact the leader if intending to attend. We will then proceed along the footpath onto the site where we hope to find a good selection of winter birds on this premier location. Afterwards we will travel to Bodenham Lake (SO529:512) where lunch will be consumed followed by a walk around the lake culminating at the hide. Moderate walking gradients with the possibility of wet and muddy conditions in places. No dogs please.

Leader: Gerald Parker (tel: 01432 760023)

WWT Slimbridge

December 10th Saturday

Meet at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust car park (SO722:048) (GL2 7BT) at 10.00am for a visit to this prestigious location. It is about 1.25 hours travel time from Hereford traffic permitting. There is a charge for non members, members have free access on production of membership card. Late arrivals should enquire at reception. Easy walking and access to the many hides. Warm clothing essential. Lunch can be carried and eaten en route or bought and consumed at the restaurant.

There is a shop and toilets on site. No dogs please.

Leader: John Pullen (tel: 01600 750266)

TOO EARLY - TOO LATE A short story by Geoff Davis.

My foot clinic is at 2.10pm, no good catching the 1.40pm bus as it's the last day of the mayfair and town will be busy. I caught the 12.40pm bus instead from Clehonger to Priors Walk, Hereford. It only took 10 minutes, thats a miracle!

I walked past Asda to the river Wye towpath. Nice to see the sand martins in the storm drains at the Rowing Club. Approaching the Old Bridge and "Oh No"!!! The swans have nested on the foot of the arch closest to the South bank facing Asda. The river is low, it will only take 6 inches and the nest will be washed away.

Oh well, carry on! I need a bench to sit on to relax and have my bag of crisps. The squirrels only like cheese and onion... This looks like a good bench under the trees looking across to the north side of the river between the Bishops Garden and Castle Green.

What the hell is that racket behind me? Two mistle thrushes going spare at 3 crows on the putting green. Two against two on the floor and the third crow has flown up into a small tree and taken a young thrush out of its nest. The only good thing arising from this is that there are three little ones left.

I just heard a sparrow hawk across the river. A female has just flown onto a row of trees putting the magpies to flit anyway. That pesky crow is back and has just taken another thrush chick. Time for action. A council lorry is parked up on the side of the towpath - the driver and his mate are asleep so I start their ride-on mower, put the blade down and drive it towards the crows, they went and the adult thrushes went back to their nest, hopefully at the end of that saga. Those two useless workers were still asleep when I shut the mower off!

Back to my seat and a sparrowhawk is calling - again a female. It's a different one, last years juvenile I think. The old female has flown down to meet it. They're fighting... the claws are out... the old one crawls to a bush and the young one is perched in a tree not too far away. Oh heck! The young sprawk is on the move again. The old one is up as well as well looking a little rough. Back at it - they fall to the ground onto some steps. Looking down to the river, the younger one is trying to drown the older one but a crow intervenes and pecks at the young one. The old one gets the upper hand and tries to drown the young one - again the crow intervenes. The old one hops into a bush and the young one flies off.

Who won? And where's the male? "Whats the time" I ask. Bloody hell!!! its 2.30pm and I have missed my appointment.....

HOC Field Meeting Reports

Tal-y-bont Reservoir and Llangorse Lake

14th April 2016

Leader: Gerald Parker

A select group of six people met at the Dam end of Tal-y-bont Reservoir at 10.00am for what turned out to be an excellent day of birdwatching. The weather was kind for once, no wind, cool and good visibility. The first bird noted was a pheasant followed by a pair of pied wagtails, one carrying nest building materials. A swallow put in an appearance, (the first of the year for some) and a cormorant flew overhead.

Looking along the length of the reservoir from the dam we saw goosander, grey heron, mute swan, a pair of wigeon and a pair of great crested grebes displaying to each other.

As we drove slowly along the side of the reservoir we encountered grey wagtail, robin, goldfinch, chaffinch and little grebe. Many chiffchaffs were singing in the trees around us. More hirundines appeared over the water but this time they were sand martins busily scooping up insects just above the surface. Looking across the reservoir from one of the hides we saw a pair of goldeneye, some tufted ducks, moorhen and coot. A group of nine lesser black-backed gulls, heard then seen as they flew over in V formation.

As we neared the shallow end we found ourselves within a wooded area, part of which had been clear felled. This produced a tree pipit who gave us good views on a branch in a tree then as a bonus did several parachute glides with wings held rigid and feet dangling as it neared its perch. Here we had several willow warblers singing, a goldcrest, marsh tit, coal tit and blackcap. In the distance a mistle thrush could be heard singing and a raven called from across the valley. In a hawthorn bush at the side of the road a kind person had put some peanut feeders which were proving to be a great attraction to blue tits, great tits, siskins and greenfinch. As it was nearing lunch time we decided to eat our food in these delightful surroundings and then make our way to Llangorse Lake.

Having parked the cars, telescopes and binoculars were brought into use. Here many new species were found including a pair of oystercatchers, teal, several lapwing, many black headed gulls (which breed here) lesser black-backed gulls, house sparrow, linnets and a pair of long tailed tits. A redstart was spotted nearby high up in an ash tree by a keen eyed observer. Several reed buntings were found near the lakeside and great crested grebe and two shelduck were on the water.

Further along the lakeside we came to a hide, this one was very impressive with its thatched roof and substantial oak beams, a pity that the viewing facilities would not cater for more than six people, never mind the birds were still showing well. A nuthatch was calling behind us, two herons flew by, two sedge warblers were singing from the reedbeds and a buzzard was soaring over nearby woodland.

As we were about to leave the hide a red kite was spotted at the other side of the lake. Walking back we stopped to admire a peacock butterfly and were interrupted by a Cetti's warbler calling nearby, an excellent bird to end the day with. Altogether a total of 59 species were found and my thanks go to everyone who took part.

The Olchon Valley

25th May 2016

Leader: John Pullen

The Olchon valley welcomed 16 members with the sun and a Cuckoo serenading us, Wheatears jumping from rock to rock, a Green Woodpecker yaffled in the distance and Willow Warbler and Redstart sung nearby. We moved off up the hillside searching for the elusive singing male Redstart followed by the viewing of a pair of Pied Flycatchers gathering nesting material. Then on to the base of the steeper ascent here we watched a whinchat singing from the top of a hawthorn tree, a peregrine was on an observation watch point observing the fantastic courtship display of its male partner. He was distracted by a dog fox sloping down the hillside towards the female so he dive-bombed the fox three times pecking

the foxes neck, it quickly rushed into the under growth. Further up the slope were more singing wheatears and a willow warbler joined by stonechat and linnet. We lunched along the road by the ford more redstarts and whitethroats along with goldfinch, blackcap long-tailed tit and tree creeper. Next stop was at Black Hill, a pair of redpoll were singing and displaying on the top of a fir tree; a tree pipit sang from an oak tree and two male garden warblers sung while a female skulked in a holly tree. Our final destination was Clodock and the river Monnow, a grey wagtail passed overhead, greenfinches wheezed and jackdaws nested under the church roof, 44 species were noted. My thanks to all who attended this popular field trip.

Lea and Pagets Wood and Common Hill

18th May 2016

Leader: John Pullen

Would we bird watch between the drops of heavy rain forecast or in between scurrying clouds? Eight HOC members arrived no rain, clouds rushing by, blackbirds singing all-around and calls from a green woodpecker. We entered the wood tits and blackcaps singing and twayblades, early purple orchids and woodruff at our feet. We walked through the wood and viewed over the country side kestrel, jackdaw and magpie were observed. Returning through the wood a dunnock sang, a buzzard's nest viewed and a blue tit carried food to its nest. We went on to Common Hill swift, house martin and swallow flying over, a garden warbler sang and a sparrow hawk flew over carrying a vole. We saw bullfinches and glimpses of a singing goldcrest this was the tenth one we had heard. We looked for slow worms under a galvanised sheet only to find a shrew's nest. We ended learning the life cycle of an intriguing plant the butchers broom with its spiky pseudo leaves. Heard as we returned to the car park was a whitethroat singing away in a clearing.

In all, the birdlife lived up to its reputation during this glorious morning chorus, and some very hot and tired birders made there way home after a good walk around this interesting Forestry Commission wood. We had a total of 27 species seen or heard, and I would like to thank all of those early morning risers for making it a lovely start to a Sunday morning.

Madley Environmental Study Centre (MESc) Nature Reserve

18th May 2016

Leader: Geoff Davis

My name is Geoff Davis and I was the leader of this HOC walk. I actually do a survey every year for Louise and Steve, the two hands-on staff at the centre. A copy of the report is also sent to HOC. It was forecast to rain but it didn't. The weather was very close though and at times it was hard to breathe.

Eight of us met in the main car park for 8.30am. A few species entered the notebooks straight away including green and great spotted woodpeckers, song thrush, chiffchaff and swallow. The swallow was flying into the bike shed and is the only one that has survived as the rest were knocked down a couple of years ago as they were pooing on the motorbikes.

The toilet area and the main pool was relatively quiet except for the odd blackcap, wren, dunnock and blackbird. The top end of the reserve is usually alive with small species but alas, the rough vegetation was cut back in the spring which will probably benefit next years birds more. We still managed to get whitethroat, goldfinch, chaffinch and really good views of a garden warbler. A couple of buzzards were trying to make their minds up whether to fly or perch.

There are plenty of corvids around here, crows, rooks, jackdaws, magpies and jays were all seen in abundance and a few odd gulls creeping in from the sewage plant nearby. On the far end of the walk there was a muggy (cat) curled up in an old sally tree, probably waiting for the many tits that were searching for food in the tree.

On the way back to the car park we saw a couple of house martins, swifts, gold crest and a skylark. Oh! nearly forgot the linnets and stock doves. We left there just after 11 am after seeing 35 species.

We reconvened at Honeymoon common until 12.45pm where it was hotter. We had a walk around this lovely common and saw many of the birds we had seen at the other site including mallard with 6 ducklings. The four species seen here were house sparrow, greenfinch, kestrel and curlew which was heard nearby. I thank those who made the effort to join me and to the many that didn't, maybe next time! Bird count - 29 species.

Aylestone Park (HOC contribution to Herefordshire Walking Festival) 21st June 2016
Leaders: Phil and Chris Williams

An early start on the first fine morning for a week. It was disappointing that only two members of the public had signed up for this meeting. However, we were joined by seven HOC members, including our very welcome experts John Pullen and John Davies.

7.00 am saw us all gathered in Aylestone Park under a blue sunny sky. Swifts were flying above us in the car park. As we moved along the canal, we heard blackcaps singing, Goldcrest and coal tit were seen along with other hedgerow birds. A moorhen was found skulking in the reeds. Skirting the edge of the park area swallows and house martins were flying about. The central area of the park was rather quiet on the bird front but the views from the lookout at the top of the hill were clear.

Walking down the lane to Broadlands Nature reserve, overlooking the Lugg Meadows, we were treated by a family of more than 15 long-tailed tits feeding at the top of the hedgerow.

We walked the length of the reserve onto the parkland adjoining a Tupsley housing estate and saw a good number of chiffchaffs that were breeding in the area. A jay flew off as we rounded a corner but a garden warbler stayed to give us a treat with its song.

Starting down towards the meadows John Pullen found a reed bunting sitting on a branch out in the open, duly warned we all quietly approached and were rewarded with excellent views using the telescopes. A raven flew over as we walked towards the river, a buzzard, green woodpecker and a sparrowhawk were also seen.

On the side of the river in the reeds a reed warbler was singing loudly and some of the group were lucky enough to see it. A mute swan with 3 cygnets passed by us and a kingfisher was heard but not seen. Just before we left the river, to complete our walk, sand martins were seen feeding on the airborne insects and visiting their nests in the bank.

A total of 49 species were recorded on the day.

The feedback from the Festival participants was very positive. They were appreciative of the help and information from the HOC members which made it a most pleasant and informative walk.

TREASURERS JOTTINGS

My optimism about improvements to the car park at Holmer Hall was misplaced. While there are plans to do something, no date has yet been agreed.

In September, we are going to ask members to take part in a simple survey which will help us to plan how best to improve what HOC does. This survey will be available for completion on-line and our "email" members will be notified when it is ready.

We would also like those of you who do not have email to take part as it will be good to have as broad a response as possible. Rather than send out a printed version of the survey to everyone, **please get in touch with me if you would like to participate** and I will send you a copy for completion.

Jim Wilkinson

White stork in Herefordshire

An unusual bird for Herefordshire, an adult White Stork, was reported on the 10th June 2016 by S. Thackwray. It was first seen in a field adjacent to a house at Weston Beggard after which it flew onto the roof where it stayed for about an hour quite undisturbed by people and dogs in the garden. A green colour ring was present on its right leg and the number Z1213 enabled the bird to be traced.



White stork picture taken by Mick Colquhoun

He is a Polish immigrant!

Having been injured in a collision with a power line in his native country, he was sent subsequently (with several others) to Shorelands Wildlife Gardens in Norfolk for rehabilitation. He made a good recovery and subsequently flew off! He was seen soon afterwards at Welney WWT, reserve 50 miles to the west of Shorelands, but then his movements are unknown until he arrived in Herefordshire.

He has remained in the Weston Beggard area, feeding in fields during the day and returning to roost on the roof of a barn on private land at night. He appears to have a restricted range confining himself to the area between Bartestree, Withington and Stoke Edith.

He seems currently to be well and fairly settled. He is flying normally, so it seems that he has made a full recovery.

Mick Colquhoun

SPRING HAD SPRUNG

Hearing the first cuckoo of spring whilst sat on my south facing doorstep was too good to be true for it was only the 23rd of March. For three long silent years I had been deprived of his joyous call after having radiotherapy on my head and neck. He announced his arrival to one and all that 'spring had indeed sprung'. Tawny Owls called out in the budding woods and we had already witnessed the arrival of the black kites from Africa the week before and had heard their 'trilling' call to one another from on high. The chanting great tits had already partitioned their areas for nesting sites and arrived each day to feed on the tit bits we had thrown onto the slabs. The clicking black redstarts had returned in force to our garden, competing with our resident robins. Mistle thrushes forewarned us about rain storms and male blackbirds too numerous to count had taken up their afternoon singing perches. I suppose their wives were sitting quietly close by on their ever growing number of eggs. New warblers were arriving every day and I have to admit I do have trouble naming them. But what the heck! I can hear them churring away in our newly planted hedgerow. Our house sparrows noisily squabbled, darting between the house's eaves and the 'veggy' plot. The two collared doves cooed and kissed and everything in the world seemed so sweet and peaceful.



A few weeks later I awoke early and stirred my husband muttering, "I can hear the dawn chorus. Hark!" What a joyous sound and it brought back memories of a Dawn Chorus event at Titley Pool which I had arranged for Weobley Nature Trust group. A successful event due to having the presence of Keith Mason, John Davies and other HOC members too numerous to mention who called out the names of the birds to us novices as they joined in this heavenly sound. Afterwards, after having restored our souls and minds to full vigour, I took out the frying pan and camping stove from the boot of my car and cooked up a pound or two of sausages for our breakfast.

Life could never get any better than this I thought; birds, friends and hot sausage sandwiches in that order. Douglas Welch my loyal friend recorded that moment in time and I just hope that he passed the tape onto a sensitively minded person to keep for prosperity. With all these long lost thoughts and sounds I felt that this spring was going to be something special for us both as my hearing had almost returned to normal.

The following mornings I lazily drowsed, vainly listening for that special sound – the hoopoe – which would have been the icing on the cake. Then one morning whilst opening the gate for us to leave to do some shopping, a forked tail and a flash of metallic blue and orange streamed by. "A swallow", I shouted to my husband, "a male as usual," and we glowed with excitement as he landed on our telephone wire. It had all happened so quickly. Spring's arrival with the cuckoo and "now it's summer," I said. "No," said my husband, "one swallow does not make a summer." And our brave little fellow waited on.

Norma Forrest

(Image of Blackcap taken by John Tilby)

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.

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.

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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