

HOC NEWS

quarterly bulletin for herefordshire birdwatchers

254
November
2020

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Editorial

by Frances Weeks

Welcome to the November issue of the HOC News. This quarter's publication sees a welcome return for our *Field Meetings* page! Fingers crossed that these resume from January. We also have a new feature aimed at younger enthusiasts, *Discovering Birds - for Families* - do let us know what you think.

Our *Birding Spotlight* series continues with Hergest Ridge and Eastnor Deer Park, both great sites for a wintery walk, Gareth Morgan dips into the archives once more and Robert Taylor keeps us guessing in *What's in a Name?*

A huge thank you to all our contributors and, as ever, do get in touch if you have an article or photograph you are interested in submitting.

For more local birding news and views, please do also browse our website, herefordshirebirds.org, where you will find further blogs (*It's all about migration*) and news (The Fair Isle Bird Observatory appeal), details of all our Herefordshire birding sites, a gallery of fantastic photos and much more!



"Just checking before I leave" by Gerald Wells

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Cattle Egret, Magna Castra Farm, Credenhill by Dennis Longmore

Notes from the Chair

by Susanna Grunsell

Since our last Newsletter, we have had a temporary end to severe restrictions, and now a resurgence of the virus in our country, and further advice to stay put for many of us. I hope that you all have managed to stay healthy and safe from infection.

I am sorry to start on a sombre note but we have to report that we have been unsuccessful in attracting any interest in the vacant post of Secretary for the Club. Some Committee members have been doing their best to fill in the essential tasks involved in this post over the past year. But we agreed that the continuing absence of a Secretary has become, again, a threat to our existence as a club. We again appeal to our membership for HELP. If you can help in any way at this time, please contact us urgently. The County and its birds needs our voice and presence in the years ahead URGENTLY.

In the last days of September, I managed to visit Bodenham Lake and see machinery poised for action with the on-going project there. With the dense tree foliage at this time of the year, much of the water can only be viewed from the southern path. The birdlife remains the same, with typically three Little Egrets and eighteen Grey Heron reported later that day. The hides remain closed. We were pleased to see a small group of House Martins, on passage, feeding in the sun above us.

In the latest issue of the Garden Birdwatch report, *The Birdfeeder*, the following was remarked on: there are now records from 31 gardens, and a total of 63 species seen; there are now 10 gardens reporting more than 25 species seen over the last quarter and the only bird seen less in our gardens, compared to the same quarter last year, was the House Sparrow.

I look forward to reading the next instalment of the Club's History by our President, Gareth Morgan in this issue of the Newsletter. It was amazing to read that it was 16 years since the beginning of the nesting of Red Kite in the County.

As we anticipated in the last Newsletter, we have now held two interesting virtual "Indoor Meetings". The first was by Professor Steve Ormerod, from Cardiff University. He spoke on the increasing pollution of Welsh rivers and streams. The effect on the Dipper was graphically shown. We look forward to further lectures via zoom in the coming months. It has been such a pleasure to see the faces of our club members, and those from further afield, who have joined us for these evenings. I am sorry that there are still many who do not have access to the internet, or choose not to, for these occasions.

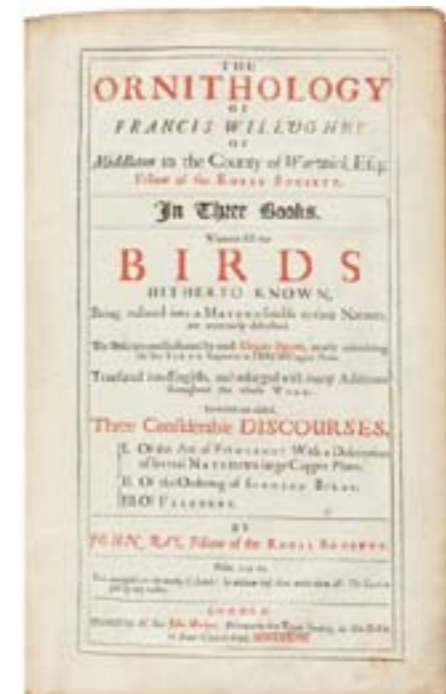
Please show your interest in our future by responding to the plea for help at the beginning of these notes.

Happy birding in the next few months and keep safe.

What's in a Name? No. 6

by Robert Taylor

These migrant birds tend to first appear in October and remain until early spring. The common name of this bird first appeared in print, like many other species, in 1687 in *The Ornithology of Francis Willughby* by John Ray (which was the subject of our Dr Walker Memorial Lecture by Tim Birkhead in 2019).



This species is known colloquially as the Felt in Northamptonshire, the Windle in Devon and the Winnard and Swine Pip in several locations. This latter name is believed to have derived from the sound of the pipe used by shepherds of old when collecting animals under their charge, being similar to the soft whistling call of the bird.

In continental Europe, the species can be found feeding in vineyards, leading to their old German name of Weingaerdsvogel (vineyard bird) and Vindrossel (meaning the bird that feeds in vineyards) in Denmark. Whilst vineyards are now increasingly common in Britain, they did not exist here at the time the local names were being used in continental Europe, and the name became mistranslated as Wind Thrush in Britain. Here it was believed (with good reason) that the migratory movements of these birds were aided by the winter winds, leading to the names Windle and Winnard.

Whilst grapes might have been consumed in Europe, in Britain, fallen apples in orchards and gardens are a more important source of food during autumn and winter. It seems that some of the cultural differences distinguishing continental European and British human populations exist amongst birds also!

The Blackbird, one of the close relatives of this species, is very fond of grapes and is frequently seen plucking fruits in the vine on the back of our house.

The most important diagnostic feature of this bird, and reflected in its common name, is of no use whatsoever to the one in twelve males (of which I am one) in the UK who suffer from a common genetically inherited visual malfunction. Fortunately for those like me, the species has other distinguishing features, such as distinct whitish stripes above the eye and beneath the cheek and the aforementioned call of the bird most often heard overhead during migration.

The species' scientific name *Turdus iliacus* gives further clues to its identity, with 'turdus' deriving from the Latin for "thrush" and 'iliacus' from the Latin word ile for "flank". Still confused? See the back page for the answer.

From the Archives: HOC History 2006-2010 by Gareth Morgan



Oystercatchers, Kenchester by Nick Pegler



Osprey, Wellington Gravel Pits by Kevin Jones

2006

President: Ifor Evans; Chairman: Nick Smith

This edition, which was the third in the trilogy edited by William Marler, was sponsored by Peter Smith of E. Smith & Co, Solicitors, of Kington.

Members learned of the death of Joan Fox, who had died aged 92. Her passing brought back many memories for the older members.

Twenty-one Field Meetings took place, spread throughout the year in every month except May. Eight Indoor Meetings, covering topics relating to many parts of the globe, were attended by many members.

The annual week-end away, organised by Sheila Taylor, was based at Plas Tan-y-Bwlch, not far from Portmeirion. All participants enjoyed the time spent in this part of the UK. The Weather Report, ably composed as usual by John Pullen, reminded us that July 2006 was the hottest since 1882.

Many of the photographs displayed throughout the Report were taken by George Ewart. The Education sub-committee, under the chairmanship of Brian Willder, put on a display

of material relevant to HOC's objectives in Hereford City Museum between May and July. The success of this activity was in large part due to the continuing effort of Val Jermy, Chris Mason and Norma Perry.

The sub-committee also organised three training sessions to improve members' bird identification skills. Forty members benefitted from these sessions.

There were more training sessions related to the Atlas, which was absorbing the amount of time which such an ambitious project deserved. The Chairman's Report refers to so many diverse activities undertaken by Club members that it is a matter of pride to belong to such an august body.

Dave Coker, whose annual reports contain so much detailed information, reported that 3,547 birds were ringed in the County.

Among other avian references, there is mention of Hoopoe, Corncrake, Corn Buntings, Scandinavian Rock Pipit, Woodcock, Barn Owls and Dippers.

Time to re-read your copy of the Annual Report and the Newsletters for that year.

2007

President: Ifor Evans; Chairman: Nick Smith

This was the first AR to be edited by Hilary Jones, aided by County Recorder Steve Coney.

John Pullen's Weather Report reminded us that January was the warmest since 1921, and the hottest April since the 19th Century. There was considerable flooding in the early part of the year, bringing in Wigeon and Goosanders. John also wrote a good article on "The birds of the Gamber Meadows." Well worth re-reading. Further, John led a group of two adults and ten children from Kings Cuple on a very successful morning walk in April, seeing and hearing a good number of species.

Notable species seen during the year included a Lesser Yellowlegs (recorded by Paul Downes and Steve Coney), Corncrake, Manx Shearwater and Osprey.

Twenty-one Field Meetings, within and outwith the County, plus a weekend in Cumbria (organised by Sheila Taylor) were well attended, as were the seven Indoor Meetings.

Work on the Atlas continued apace, urged on by Chairman Nick and a dedicated team of enthusiastic volunteers.

Guy Poulton and Sue Evans opened their garden to raise funds for the HNT. Tony Norman arranged a Family Day at The Leen Farm, Pembridge, which included a display by a licensed ringer.

Brian Willder wrote a fascinating article about the Predatory Birds Monitoring Scheme. A good read.

President Ifor's Historical Note no.24 described the enthronement feast of the Archbishop of York in 1465. This was probably before vegans were catered for. The detailed

list is not for the faint-hearted. Ifor also expressed his anger at the massacre of birds flying over Malta, like the UK a member of the EU, but ignoring their obligations.

The November Bulletin included an obituary for Robin Jeffries, whom many members will remember.

2008

President: Ifor Evans; Chairman: Nick Smith

The Atlas was continuing to gather momentum, with 161 observers and 151 breeding species to date. Steve Coney thanked all the members who had completed their first winter counts. The National Lottery awarded the Club a grant of £8,000 towards the purchase of a projector, screen, display boards and website development.

Plenty of exciting bird sightings: first Yellow-browed Warbler, at Hereford sewage works in February; Great Grey Shrike at New House Farm, also February; 200+ Bramblings at Shobdon in March; Quail; Honey Buzzard; Dartford Warbler, Osprey and Waxwings.

John Vickerman organised a visit to Salisbury Plain to see Great Bustards and Stone-curlew. Picture a dozen intrepid birders, clad in warm waterproofs and boots, plus scopes and tripods, crammed into a twelve-seater lwb Land Rover.

President Ifor wrote about specimens of White-tailed Eagle in the County, making reference to the work of George Horne: *Birds of Herefordshire 1889* and T. Hutchinson: *Birds of*

Herefordshire 1902.

Sheila Taylor organised – for the last time – the weekend away, this year in Norfolk. Thank you Sheila (and Maurice), much appreciated.

Dave Coker's ringing report this year highlighted the long term work on Pied Flycatchers, since 1968, of Dr David Boddington.

Bringsty Common bracken was mechanically crushed during the nesting period for ground and low-level nesting birds. Tom Weale led the battle against this practice on behalf of the Club

The Ring-necked Parakeet was added to the list of common birds in the UK.

Chris Mason became the first recipient of the new River Lugg Award for her major contribution to the Club over many years.

The Hereford Biodiversity Partnership, with HOC as the lead partner, asked for volunteers to survey known breeding sites for Tree Sparrows and assist with erection of nest boxes.

Peter Gardner wrote two strong editorials in the Bulletin, about Climate Change and the "Credit Crunch".

at least one in every month, plus a weekend away in Dorset organised by Chris Bartlett, and six Indoor Meetings.

Bird highlights included 40,000+ Starlings at Pencoyd in January, and Waxwings at Kingsland in February.

2361 birds of 55 species were ringed during the year, as recorded by Dave Coker and his associates.

At a less specialist level, there were 80 gardens in the Garden Birdwatch, collated by Ian and Natalie Buttriss.

Nicky Davies, our future News Editor, made a request for help surveying Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers; Steve Coney asked members to send in reports of sightings of birds in orchards, and also sightings of any Owls, for the BTO.

One historical note dated from 1932, when Dr Walker and some of his fellow ornithologists made a study of nesting Rooks.

Keith Tillet wrote a piece on the Athene

Sanctuary to mark the retirement of Beryl Bayliss after 21 years at the helm.

Peter Eldridge eulogised the life of Eleanor Mary English.

We read a report of the cruelty of gamekeepers on the Kempton Estate near Craven Arms.

2010

President: Ifor Evans; Chairman: Nick Smith

We mourned the loss of two of our well-known and long serving members: Elaine Evans and Beryl Bayliss.

The 60th Annual Report, Hilary Jones' fourth, had to contend with the new BOU Systematic List. Fortunately, Gerald Wells provided us with an easy-to-understand explanation of the changes and the reasoning behind them, and Tony Eveleigh and John Pullen have worked their way through all the sightings.

There were 23 Field Meetings throughout the year, and six Indoor Meetings, with the weekend away in Dorset, ably managed by Chris Bartlett. Luckily, the eruption of a large Icelandic volcano in April did not have any material effect on our activities.

The list of Accepted Rarities for the year made "twitching" seem almost worthwhile. Any

of the species are worthwhile having on your life list.

As is, unfortunately, usual, the Club was short of Committee members for specific tasks, something which continues from year to year. Steve Coney stood down after 15 years as County BTO Rep. and was succeeded by Chris Robinson. Congratulate Chris, and thank you.

Work on the Atlas continued apace, with Chairman Nick keeping up momentum, and issuing positive reports throughout the year.

Other reports of interest were of the decline in numbers of Goldcrest, Wrens, Kestrels and Sparrowhawks. Time will tell if this process continues.

HOC was represented at the Weobley Ploughing Match, one of a number of venues throughout the years where willing volunteers smile at everyone in all weathers and ground conditions. Long may we continue.



Cormorants, Bodenham Gravel Pits by Nick Pegler

HOC Field Meetings: January-March 2021

We are proposing, optimistically, to resume Club Field Meetings as from January 2021. The following programme notices currently assume no Covid-19 restrictions, but clearly, depending upon the situation nearer the time and the guidelines/rules in place, it may be necessary to alter arrangements. The uncertainty is such that changes may involve a variety of modifications including possible cancellation, prior registration, limitation of numbers attending and division into smaller groups. Please check the HOC website for updated information.

Wellington Gravel Pits January 10th Sunday

This is one of the most important birding sites in Herefordshire comprising a working gravel pit with mixed habitat of several pits, reedbed, farmland and hedges. The site is crossed by a public footpath and has one small hide on this public footpath overlooking the main lake.

Meet in the car park of Wellington Gravel Pit at the main Tarmac entrance (SO 509:482; Post Code: HR4 8BY) off Haywood Lane at 1.30 p.m. This is a late start as we hope to see Starling murmurations at sunset. All walking is on the level, but please bring wellies as it can be very muddy. We shall be looking mainly for wintering wildfowl and waders.

Please contact the leader beforehand to review both the flooding situation and Covid restrictions. No dogs please.

Leader: Viv Quinn (tel: 07772 004174)

Ledbury Area February 18th Thursday

Meet at 9.30 a.m. at Ledbury Rugby Football Club, Ross Rd, Ledbury car park (SO 700:368; Post Code: HR8 2LP) for a walk along the river Leadon and back down the town trail. Easy walking but might be muddy if the river has been up. Lunch in cars and possibly walk either Eastnor Park or Castlemorton Common in the afternoon for Snipe and Jack Snipe. No dogs please.

Leader: Richard Davies (tel: 01531 634358)

Ashleworth Ham & Coombe Hill March 18th Thursday

Subject to flooding and to continuing Covid restrictions, meet at Ashleworth Ham GWT (SO 828:264) at 9.30 a.m. for wintering wildfowl, followed by a short journey to Coombe Hill GWT for a walk to view both wildfowl and waders. Both sites are on OS Explorer 179. All walking is on the level, but please bring wellies as Coombe Hill can be very muddy. Lunch in cars or at the Swan Hotel nearby – 01242 680227 – they are currently offering a 25% reduction on a 2-course lunch on a Thursday for those aged 60+. Please contact the leader beforehand to review both the flooding situation and the possibility of lunch at the Swan. No dogs please.

Leader: Chris Bartlett (tel: 01989 721080, mobile 07849 115677)

Discovering Birds - for Families:

The Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

Statistics:

Length: 33-39cm

Wingspan: 89cm

Weight: 300g

Average lifespan: 4 years

When to see: dusk and dawn, year round

Where to see: rough grassland, field edges

How to Identify:

The barn owl has a mottled silver-grey and buff back, and a pure white underside. It has a distinctive heart-shaped, white face and black eyes.

Did you know?

Barn Owls eat mainly small mammals, particularly field voles, shrews and wood mice. Prey is often swallowed whole and the bones and fur are regurgitated (coughed up) in the form of a pellet. Analysing Barn Owl pellets can tell you exactly what the owls have eaten.



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Word-search

- ◇ FLY
- ◇ TALON
- ◇ VOLE
- ◇ FIELD
- ◇ PREY
- ◇ MOUSE
- ◇ FEATHER
- ◇ PELLET
- ◇ DAWN
- ◇ DUSK
- ◇ HUNTER

Herefordshire Birding Spotlight Site 14: Eastnor Deer Park by Richard Davies

Overview

Parkland comprising mainly mature Oaks, good for hole-nesting birds, with a stream running through which has created four large ponds.

Directions, parking and access times and other facilities

Map reference: SO 745 378

Sat Nav/Post code: HR8 1RN (for Eastnor Castle)

Vehicular access: Park opposite castle gates on hard standing, or if gates to the Park are open, inside the gates.

Access by foot: Almost always open, very occasionally closed for deer management (4/5 days a year only).

Other facilities: Nothing on site, all available nearby in Ledbury.

Maps: Ordnance Survey Landranger Sheet 150 and Explorer Sheet 190.



What to See

Resident	Mallard, Moorhen, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Raven, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Buzzard, Finches, Tits, Goldcrest. Occasionally Red Kite.
Winter	Redwing, Fieldfare. Occasionally Mute Swan, Cormorant, Mandarin, Greylag Goose.
Summer	Redstart, Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, House Martin, Swallow

Resources

For details of the Deer Park see <https://eastnorcastle.com/visit-eastnor-castle/eastnor-deer-park/>
For a map of the Deer Park see <http://eastnorcastle.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/9782-Eastnor-Deer-Park-Map-HIRES-.pdf>

Nearby Sites

Hollybush; Castlemorton Common; Eastnor Castle lake and grounds when the castle is open (entrance fee payable); Coneygree Wood for Crossbill and Hawfinch. It is possible to walk from the Deer Park to Hollybush, via Eastnor Monument, but this walk is steep – details of the walk can be found at <https://showmeengland.co.uk/ledbury/tourism/midsummer-hill-walk-malvern-hills-herefordshire/>

Herefordshire Birding Spotlight Site 21: Hergest Ridge by Norman and Den Fincham

Overview

Hergest Ridge is an upland area rising to 364m a.s.l. with wide views all around. Wooded areas on the lower slopes with open moorland higher up. A steady uphill walk onto the ridge, with some steeper sections on the approaches at each side.

Directions, parking, access and other facilities

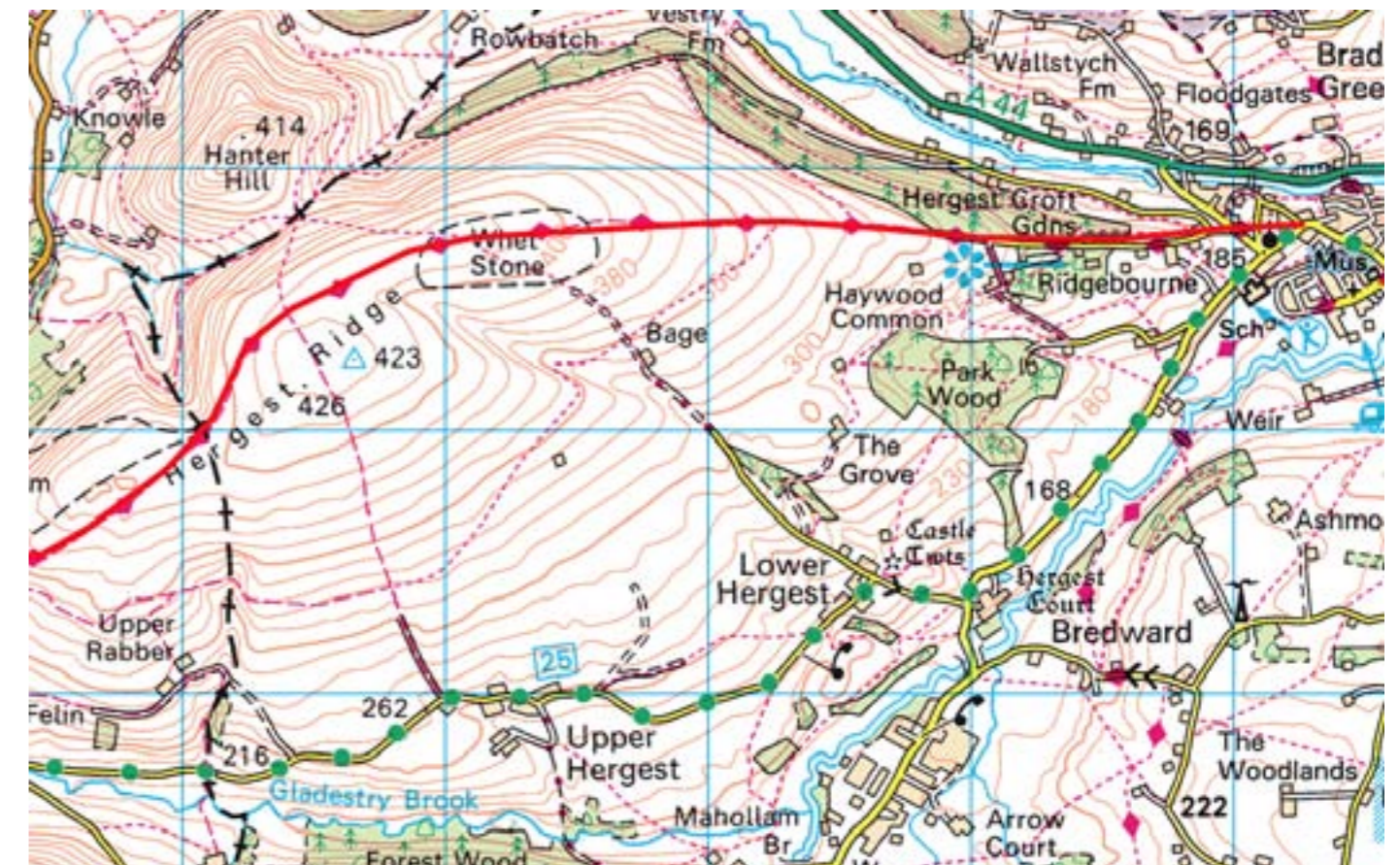
Map reference: SO 281 568

Sat Nav/Post Code: HR5 3EG (Hergest Croft Gardens)

Vehicular access: Take the A44 Kington bypass westwards, then turn left towards Hergest Croft Gardens. After a few hundred yards turn right onto Ridgebourne Road towards Hergest Croft and continue to the end of the lane to park on the verge. Open at all times.

Access by foot: Either walk from the gate at the end of Ridgebourne Road straight up to the old race-course and the Monkey Puzzle trees or take the track near the end of Ridgebourne Road through two sets of gates, then keep right towards the woodland. Continue through the wood and join a farm track which eventually joins the lane going uphill to the ridge. Alternatively, from the Whet Stone follow a track leading downhill on the Hanter Hill side of the Ridge to a stand of conifers, then turn right and steeply downhill to a farm track which eventually leads to the woodland alongside Ridgebourne Road. There are several routes back to the road from here.

Maps: Ordnance Survey Landranger Sheet 148 & Explorer Sheet 201.



What to See

Resident	Buzzard, Raven, Coal Tit, Jay, Great Spotted Woodpecker and a wide range of typical woodland and farmland/upland birds
Winter	Redwing and other resident species
Summer	Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Yellowhammer, Linnet, Swift, Swallow, Wheatear, Redstart, Buzzard, Raven, Red Kite, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Mistle Thrush, Starling, Long-tailed Tit and Grey Heron
Spring/ Autumn	Stonechat, Reed Bunting, Wood Warbler, Redstart and Spotted Flycatcher along with many summer and resident species

Resources

<http://www.hergest.co.uk/he/visitor-information> and

<https://www.walkingbritain.co.uk/walk-3300-introduction>

Nearby Sites: Bradnor Hill (SO 282 584) and Titley Pool (SO 325 595)



Redwing, Old Gore by Mick Colquhoun



Wheatear, Wellington Gravel Pits by Craig Jones



Redstart, Wellington Gravel Pits by Gerald Wells

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. Position of advert at editor's discretion. HOC does not necessarily endorse products or services advertised in its publications.

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: newsletter@herefordshirebirds.org.uk

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 may limit the quality of production.

Revenue raised through advertising 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 cooperation 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.

MEMBERSHIP 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

Chair: Susanna Grunsell

chair@herefordshirebirds.org / 01432 344837

Secretary: vacant

Membership Officer: Martin Winrow

membership@herefordshirebirds.org

Treasurer: Martin Winrow

1 Deer Park Close, Moccas, Herefordshire. HR2 9JA

treasurer@herefordshirebirds.org

Recorder: Mick Colquhoun

recorder@herefordshirebirds.org

Data Manager: Chris Robinson

datamanager@herefordshirebirds.org

Details of other Committee members can be found on the website at

www.herefordshirebirds.org/contacts

Cover image: Tagged Red Kite, Old Gore by Mick Colquhoun

Answer from ps: Redwing

www.herefordshirebirds.org

