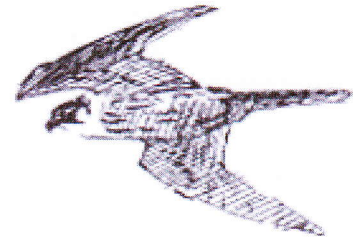




nature's  
voice



## VALE OF WHITE HORSE LOCAL GROUP

Editor Brenda Ross

# NEWSLETTER

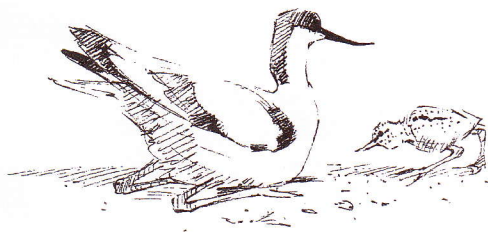
New Season 2010/11

### Birds Britannia

Birds Britannia, a programme on BBC4, detailed the changes affecting our garden birds, especially house sparrows through the ages.

10,000 years ago these birds lived alongside humans, first in agriculture and later nesting in houses and farm buildings.

From then on the fortunes of sparrows varied according to the fortunes of people.



In the C15 Queen Elizabeth made an edict that people must catch sparrows because of the damage to crops and a bounty was paid.

Later in the C19 people were encouraged to put sparrow pots on farm buildings so that they could catch and eat them.

As Victorian cities grew so sparrows came too and citizens reconnected with them,

In Newcastle in about 1876 the Dicky Bird Society was founded by a local newspaper and by 1900 300,000 members across the world had taken a pledge to be

kind to all living things, to protect them, feed the birds in winter and never destroy a nest.

Children wrote to the editor, including one letter from Dover workhouse which told how they saved the crumbs from their tables and put them out for the birds.

But the Victorian work ethic believed that this made the birds indolent and lazy! Then in a series of hard winters many birds died and ideas were changed once again.

In August 1914 the Defence of the Realm Act made wastage of food a crime so bird feeding was prohibited. One woman was fined 2 Guineas (about £100).

Sparrow clubs were set up and cups awarded to those who caught the most.

Between the wars 4 million new homes with gardens were built and sparrows thrived.

During WW2 the need to grow food was paramount and sparrows became the enemy yet again.

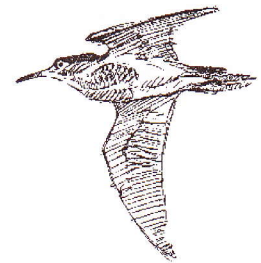
Post war houses had kitchens at the back and we started feeding birds again.



May 2000 saw a massive decline in house sparrows which was attributed to a shortage of insect food.

Nowadays the bird food industry is big business and a great variety of foods are available.

In Aug 2007 house sparrows were put on the red list of threatened species.



### Indoor Meetings

We have now had the first 2 meetings in Steventon Village Hall. There were a few problems which we hope we have solved. There are 60 parking places and should more be needed then you can park in Hanney Road by the allotments.

The tea urns have been adjusted and we apologise to those who had cold tea and coffee at first.

### What you may have missed.

Keith Offord gave his usual polished performance.

His subject was India and, accompanied by stunning photos, showed us birds, buildings, transport and tigers.

What bird tastes just like butter ? .....A stork !

Debbie Pain gave a fascinating talk in October, about the trials and tribulations of saving endangered species.

First was the Great Crane Project. Eggs were donated by the German Government but, because of the Icelandic volcano Nigél Jarrett was forced to return overland, arriving less than 24 hours before they hatched.

The second was an attempt to save the Madagascan Pochard from extinction. She described the epic journey, there and back, encountering numerous hazards; swine flu, monsoon weather, flooded roads and armed gangs.

### Outdoor Events



Our first outing was to Keyhaven and Pennington Marshes near Lymington.

On a grey cold and windy day only 5 members turned up but they were rewarded by seeing 61 species including glossy ibis, curlew sandpiper, dartford warbler and bearded tit.

The October Outing by contrast was on a beautiful day and a full coach enjoyed a feast of birds.

Titchfield Haven is a fairly compact area of river, scrapes, lakes, scrub and woodland.

The total of 65 species gave us many old favourites. We had good views of kingfisher, Brent and barnacle geese, turnstones and waders. Some were lucky enough to see bearded tits and dartford warblers.

Full reports of these talks and outings can be found on the reviews page of our website.

### Bird Crime

I have been reading the RSPB's account of bird crime in 2009. It makes grim reading. 158 reports of poisoning, 286 reports of destruction of birds of prey and 63 incidents of egg-collecting.

During 1991-1995 11 goshawk and 4 peregrine territories disappeared from the North-East Peak Moors. By 2009 there were none left.

One wonders when it will end.

On a happier note kingfishers are making a return to Britain's rivers and canals.

Capercaillie numbers have increased in Scotland's Forestry Commission properties where much work has been done to improve habitats.

I keep hearing that waxwings have arrived in great numbers but I have yet to see them! Has any member been luckier? Do write to me about them and any other special birds you have seen.



### Coming Events

To whet your appetite our December meeting features Otmoor, past, present and future.

A recent report from Peter Barker says that bearded tits were around.

A female merlin has taken up residence, hopefully for the winter. There were large flocks of wigeon and lapwings and 2 otters were spotted.

No doubt we'll hear more from David Wilding.

In January the ever popular John Wyatt will talk about Svalbard Wildlife and show some of his stunning slides.

Outings to come are a walk round Baulking Lake on 28 December to work off the excesses of Christmas!!

There is another lake to visit in January. Blashford Lake is near Ringwood.

Details of these from Steve Clod at the meetings.



### Bake for the RSPB

Looking ahead to February we have our cake stall so please get busy baking. We would appreciate it if members put a price on their creations!

### Seasons Greetings

On behalf of the committee may I wish you all the compliments of the Season and a very Happy New Year.

Website: [www.rspb-vwh.org.uk](http://www.rspb-vwh.org.uk)