

Vale of White Horse Local Group

This spring we have celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the Vale of White Horse Local Group. Malcolm Ross produced a colourful leaflet to mark the occasion. It was distributed at the Monday meeting on 10 April which proved to be an enjoyable event.



Malcolm Ross

Steve Bastow started proceedings by introducing Nick Droy, RSPB Regional Reserves Manager for the Midlands. Nick reflected that 40 years ago, he was a four year old growing up in Gloucestershire. He congratulated the group on our 40th anniversary and thanked us for the voluntary work we do to raise funds and to connect people with nature. Important work within the Midlands area is the return of booming bitterns to Otmoor and the plans at Sherwood Forest to revitalise the visitor centre and reinstate the forest.

Our main speaker was Peter Holden MBE on 'Giving Nature A Home'. Peter also began by congratulating us on our anniversary and remarking how pleasing it was to see some of the original members here. Part of the RSPB's thinking when they changed to 'Giving Nature

A Home' was what can members do? One obvious answer was 'gardens'. Peter began his illustrated talk by showing us the RSPB's ten-point plan for a good wildlife garden: grow flowering plants, invest in a tree or shrub, leave grass to grow longer, dead wood, garden pond, feed garden birds, build a wildlife shelter, green corridors, be green.

Peter explained that he was involved at the outset of the Big Garden Birdwatch (BGBW) project. It began life in 1978 as a planned project for children. The producers of Blue Peter were taken by the idea and featured it on their programme in 1979, when 34,000 children participated. The 1979 data still forms the baseline data for all the BGBW surveys. It was not until 2000 that it was extended to adults, coinciding with it going online.

Using excellent photographs and sound recordings, Peter looked in detail at some of the birds that featured in the first, and also the 2017 BGBW top 10 results. He also looked at other garden creatures such as hedgehogs, frogs, toads, butterflies, moths, bats and ladybirds.

Peter's well-received talk was rounded off by sharing his own top twelve tips for good wildlife gardens:

- Native trees and shrubs
- Nectar rich flowers
- Berry bearing shrubs
- Wild area
- Bird feeders
- Bird table
- Water
- Ground feeders
- Nest box

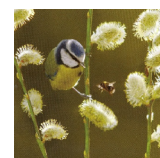
Thick thorny shrubs
Some longer grass
Climbing plants

Margaret Meardon cut the celebration cake in the interval and everyone enjoyed a slice.



Names of the people in the photo from L to R Nick Droy, Margaret, Steve Bastow and Peter Holden.

Finally a greetings card from Mike Clarke, Chief Executive RSPB



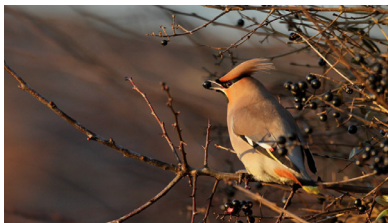
Vale of White Horse Local Group

To,
Everyone in the RSPB Vale of White Horse local Group, congratulations on reaching your 40th anniversary!
Thank you for all your help and support for the work of the Society, and for spreading the word for birds, nature conservation and the RSPB.
With very best wishes from all your friends and colleagues in the RSPB,
Mike
Mike Clarke, Chief Executive, RSPB

Big Garden Birdwatch

So this is an opportune place to mention the Big Garden Birdwatch 2017 results for Oxfordshire; 8332 adults and children participated in the three day event in January. Here are the top 20 birds in order: house sparrow, blackbird, starling, wood pigeon, blue tit, goldfinch, robin, long-tailed tit, great tit, collared dove, dunnock, chaffinch, jackdaw, magpie, carrion crow, coal tit, wren, greenfinch, feral pigeon, rook.

These results are very similar to the pattern for England as a whole; apart from 'common gull' (black-headed gull?) being more frequently seen nationally than 'rook' in the local list. Numbers for half of the top 20 species fell compared with 2016; the RSPB suggesting that wet weather during the breeding season killed off caterpillars so there was less food available for feeding tits and other small birds which then had less chance of survival. Numbers of robins, goldfinches and blackbirds showed an increase. Greenfinch numbers are still low since trichomonosis in the 1990s. Some people were lucky enough to spot waxwings this year.



c Andy Hay rspb-images.com

Forthcoming meetings and outings

The AGM is coming up next on 15 May; please arrive early at 7.15 pm for this meeting; it will be followed by a talk on 'College Lake History and Nature' by Leo Keedy. Leo Keedy, a past apprentice with the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust's 'Developing Green Talent scheme', will speak about the origin, development and progress at College Lake from a chalk quarry to a beautiful nature reserve. He will describe the habitats that have been developed on the site, and how they manage

those habitats to benefit wildlife, and cover some of the wonderful species that are found on the site and what they are doing to protect them.

Paxton Pits

There is a coach outing on Sunday 21 May to Paxton Pits with the Oxford Local Group, leaving Didcot at 7.30 am. Paxton Pits Nature Reserve is a rich mosaic of wildlife habitats covering, at present, 78 hectares of lakes, riverside, meadow, reedbed, scrub and woodland, situated in the Great Ouse valley between St Neots and Huntingdon. The Reserve is famous for its nightingales and cormorants, and is host to a wide variety of other birds, insects, mammals and flora.

Greenham Common

There is an evening car outing on Saturday 17 June to Greenham Common in the hope of spotting nightjars. Meet at 8.30 pm. Contact Steve Cload for details. (stephencload409@btinternet.com)

Meeting refreshments

Another request for volunteers to help with tea and coffee at meetings. Thank you to those who have already signed up on the rota.

Reports on recent meetings

The January meeting was held unexpectedly in the cosy Ladygrove room and saw the welcome return of Mike Read who leads birding tours to 'France North and South'. Many members have visited the Carentin marshes, Mont Saint Michel, the Carmargue, Les Alpilles or the Pyrenees and enjoyed Mike's excellent photos.

In February Colin Wilkinson from the RSPB Midland Office spoke on 'Pirates of the Caribbean'; he had spent a month on Anguilla in 2007 with BirdLife International, surveying the largest sooty tern colony in the Caribbean and carrying out a rat eradication programme. The terrain of dense thorn scrub made surveying very difficult, but there were many birds

to be seen such as black-browed albatross, humming birds, brown booby, brown nobby, and also turtles, iguana and lizards.

In March 'Woodland Wildlife and the Ridgeway' by John Tyler was an informative and amusing talk on woodlands through the cycles of days, seasons and after clearance. He showed some marvellous photographs of fungi. The second part of the talk was a leisurely look at the historic sites of the Ridgeway; John recommended spending two weeks there, and then Steve Bastow admitted his plan for a mountain bike trip along the whole route in one day!

Recent outings

In February, Martin Latham led a car trip to Port Meadow in Oxford; fortunately there was some floodwater and waders to be seen; also treeceeper and goldcrest. On this Sunday morning though, there was some disturbance from dogs.

In March, five Group members joined the coach outing to Keyhaven and Pennington and on a hot day were treated to sightings of 24 eider, Slavonian grebe, garganey, Dartford warbler and spotted redshank.

An April outing to Linky Down in the Chilterns, failed to spot ring ousel. Better luck next year!

Photo Competition

Congratulations to the winner of this year's photo competition who is Bob Knight with a portrait of a grey mining bee.



Space is running out so the next newsletter will include a report on the weekend away to Somerset.

Thanks to Gill Riches and Jane Rudd for their contributions.

Felicity Jenkins