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nature
a home**

The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home.

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Editor Felicity Jenkins

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2019

Vale of White Horse Local Group

This is the Vale local group spring newsletter, although most of us feel we have already enjoyed summer in February. Bumblebees, brimstones and peacocks are out and about among the spring bulbs.



daffodil narcissus © Heather Stuckey

Committee news

Bob Knight has kindly agreed to become group leader, David Marshall has volunteered to be vice group leader and Tim Pett is willing to take over as membership secretary. These appointments are to be confirmed and will be put to the members' vote at the AGM.

Forthcoming events indoors

The 15 April talk will be 'A Naturalist in Northumberland' by Brian Gallop. The emphasis will be on the birds, but will also cover the wide range of scenery, history and natural history of the area.



Roseate terns in Northumberland ©Tim Melling

There will also be a plant sale; please bring contributions for this important fund raising event.

AGM

The AGM will take place on 20 May at 7.15pm. Please note the change of date and the earlier start. Any items for the AGM should be sent beforehand to Jane Rudd at henry.rudd@sky.com. A talk about our local RSPB reserve will follow. David Wilding, the site manager, will tell us what happens year round 'Behind the Scenes at Otmoor'.



Otmoor © Felicity Jenkins

Outdoor excursions

A coach trip with the RSPB Oxford local group to Rutland Water is planned for Sunday 14 April. Departure at 7.45 am from Sports & Leisure Centre, Court Place Farm, Marsh Lane Marston Oxford OX3 0NQ, just off the Oxford northern bypass. This internationally famous reserve provides one of the most important wildfowl sanctuaries in Great Britain, regularly holding in excess of 25 000 waterfowl. Recent sightings include smew, black-necked and Slavonian grebe. On Sunday 19 May there is a full day car outing to Beaulieu Road Station in the New Forest, one of our regular destinations (meet on site 10.00am SO42 7YQ). Contact Martin Latham martinj.latham@googlemail.com or 01235 851918 for information, car

sharing or lifts.

Finally on Saturday June 8 there is the annual summer car trip to Greenham Common, Newbury, meeting on site 8.30 pm (full details to be advised). We hope to see nightjars, which usually make an appearance there at dusk. There is a chance of spotting woodcock and glow worms too.

Review of winter field trips

by Martin Latham

In December seven members visited Port Meadow in Oxford on an overcast but fairly mild day. Around one thousand wigeon were viewed on the lake along with a few teal and pintail. A flock of lapwing and a flock of golden plover were spotted flying over the meadow. A grey wagtail was seen feeding at the edge of the flood and a kestrel showed off its hovering skills.



kestrel © Mike Langman

London Wildfowl and Wetland Centre

Five members from the Vale joined forces with the RSPB Oxford local group to visit this remarkable urban nature reserve in January. First opened in 2000 and managed by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, the site covers some 100 acres and is formed from four disused Victorian reservoirs situated in a loop in the Thames.

As we stepped out of the coach on arrival we were greeted by a lively screeching and a flash of green as a couple of ring-necked parakeets hurtled overhead. These were the first of many that we were to encounter during our visit. Some we glimpsed dashing over the wetland at breakneck speed or playing follow-my-leader through the trees and along the hedgerows; others we observed at leisure as they balanced on the bird feeders.



ring-necked parakeet © Ben Andrew

Another introduced species that appeared to be very much at home was the Egyptian goose. Originally an escapee from ornamental collections, this exotic water bird has greatly increased in recent years and is becoming a regular sight in many parts of the country. Among the more 'traditional' British birds were great crested grebe, cormorant, grey heron, wigeon, teal, gadwall, shoveler, pintail, tufted duck, sparrowhawk, snipe, lapwing, common gull, stock dove and reed bunting. These provided a great supporting cast to such stars as bittern (at least two visible from the hides), Iceland gull (a very fine third-winter bird) and peregrine (a resident bird spent much time perching on Charing Cross Hospital and on the various cranes adjacent to the Wetland Centre). The range of wildlife making a living within the capital is quite astonishing! If the habitat is provided, the birds will come. 'Little brown jobs' included Cetti's Warbler and water pipit, both new birds for the year for many of us. Last but not least, the bird feeders proved a major attraction for avian and human visitors alike. I think all would agree that it is always satisfying to see long-tailed tits, greenfinches and goldfinches at

close quarters.

Radley Lakes

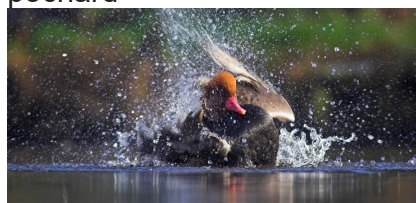
Ten members turned up for this meeting in February. For some of us it was to be an exploration of new territory, and it was an excellent morning to do just that. After a misty start, we were to experience one of the brightest and most spring-like days of the year so far. Blackbirds, song thrushes, great tits and chaffinches were in good voice and from time to time we caught sight of the brilliant yellow of brimstone butterflies.

The main part of our visit was a circular walk round Thrupp Lake. To reach the lake our itinerary took us along some well-wooded paths and past hedgerows, reedbeds and a couple of ashpits - an interesting patchwork of habitats. Birds encountered along the way included redwing, chiffchaff, bullfinch, goldcrest, Cetti's warbler, a yaffling green woodpecker, a drumming great spotted woodpecker and a group of siskins. The ash pits produced a little egret, a flock of some 20 teal and a dozen or so lapwings.



green woodpecker © Ben Andrew

Thrupp Lake itself was bustling with birdlife. In addition to the many Canada geese, black-headed, herring and lesser black-backed gulls, it hosted an impressive range of ducks. There were several pairs of gadwall and mallard and parties of wigeon, teal, tufted duck and pochard, as well as a splendid drake red-crested pochard



red-crested pochard © Ben Hall

Other species recorded during our walk included red kite, buzzard, kingfisher, mistle thrush, long-tailed tit and reed bunting. After a thoroughly enjoyable morning, we left with the impression that this was a site well worth visiting on a regular basis.

Review of indoor meetings

Congratulations to the quiz winner at the December meeting: Kim Hamilton, one of the founder members of our Local group.

In January we welcomed back Mike Read who runs wildlife watching tours. His talk was about Corsica in spring; its coastal limestone cliffs in the south, dramatic central mountains above 8000 feet, river valleys, and eastern coastal marshes. There is a wide variety of birds and flowers to be seen, from Cory's shearwaters, rock thrush, butterfly orchids, lammergeier, firecrest, wryneck, Marmora's warbler, Illyrian lilies to flamingoes and endemics like Corsican nuthatch. Mike showed excellent photographs and his presentation was well-received.

In February Conor Jameson, who works for Birdlife International, told the story of his quest for goshawks at home and abroad in 'Looking for the Goshawk- the Lost Raptor'. Goshawks were hunted to extinction in the UK in the nineteenth century, but escaped falconers' birds re-established feral populations in various forest locations in the 1970s. Conor mentioned interesting historical records, for example goshawk feature in the Domesday Book and the Bayeux tapestry. His own first sighting was a stuffed bird in a junkshop in York. He searched in forests with little success. But subsequent visits to Berlin led to close encounters with many goshawks in city parks. We were treated to many extraordinary pictures of these iconic birds. Goshawks breed in the New Forest, Forest of Dean, Peak District and elsewhere. It is known that top predators in ecosystems

are an advantage to all species, and furthermore they prey on grey squirrel and woodpigeon. But they are still persecuted on UK grouse moors. Hopefully one day their range might spread to Oxfordshire.

News from the Midlands

by Nadia Archer, Local Group Leader
RSPB

Swifts in Oxford

For those of you who have been following the story of the Oxford swift city project, you might be interested to hear that work has begun to build the swift tower in the University Parks, with a digger on site excavating the foundations. This is a hugely exciting step towards completing the project. Much credit for this goes to RSPB Midlands Conservation Officer Charlotte Kinnear, and David Holt of the Oxford University Estates Team, for pulling out all the stops to make this a reality. The tower is being built as part of the Oxford Swift City project. The tower design was selected following a competition and will hopefully become a place for swifts to nest in the city, as well as an important tool for raising awareness of the beautiful iconic species.



Swift tower © Felicity Jenkins

New RSPB reserve

It has been an exciting couple of months for the RSPB in the midlands, I am sure you have heard about our brand new reserve by now. Of course I am talking about Sherwood Forest. Sherwood is made up of some incredibly rare and impressive habitats, ancient oak and birch woodland and heathland. This habitat is a priority for the RSPB and hugely biodiverse. It is not the birds that make this place so special, although they are pretty cool, it is the invertebrates and rare fungi that thrive here. As trees

age, fungi reach areas of damage and slowly start to cause the tree to rot. This sounds horrible but it is a perfectly normal part of its life. A tree that has started to rot will become home to a whole plethora of insects that rely on laying larvae in old trees as part of their life cycle. Sherwood boasts an impressive collection of insects and spiders, making it one of the most important sites in the UK. The northern part of the National Nature Reserve is called Budby South Forest. This is an area of heathland that we have managed since 2015. The main focus of work here is to reduce the growth of scrub and trees and restore the open heathland, left unmanaged this would become a forest, which is no good for the heathland specialists that prefer areas of bare ground and heather and gorse. This year we are pleased to report an impressive display from woodlarks, tree pipits and nightjars.

RSPB Saving Nature Scheme

From RSPB National Involve Newsletter
Winter 2018 (edited)

The RSPB Saving Nature Scheme empowers volunteers to carry out direct, hands-on action to recover and conserve protected species in the UK. This has been achieved through training and equipping volunteers to undertake specialist, highly-skilled roles, supported and led by a volunteer coordinator. The pilot Saving Nature Scheme in the South West was completed in 2018, leaving a lasting legacy of skilled and capable volunteer teams to monitor, protect and raise awareness about some of our rarest species including cranes, girl buntings, stone curlews, great white egrets, choughs and little terns. At the 2018 RSPB AGM, the dedication of the volunteers in the Isles of Scilly was recognised when they received a Presidents' Award for their success in keeping the islands rat-free, resulting in the gradual recovery of endemic seabirds.

In Eastern England, the volunteer

coordinators have contributed their time, enthusiasm and expertise to recruiting, training and managing over 130 volunteers involved with the recovery of little terns, and stone curlews.

Little terns have had a good breeding season in Essex, thanks to the efforts of the Essex little tern coordinator, Paul Davis, and his team. Paul worked with a local potter to create beautiful little tern decoys which he placed in suitable habitats around the coastline to attract birds to nest.

In Norfolk and Suffolk, the little tern volunteers have continued to raise awareness with the public about the recovery work of the RSPB and partners. Several volunteers have learnt new skills this year in monitoring and nest protection, and participated in ringing activities.



stone curlew © Andy Hay

The stone curlew team in the Brecks, led by volunteer coordinator Jeff Baker, have continued to monitor and protect this slowly recovering species. Next year they plan to expand their activities and provide support and advice to farmers to better manage stone curlew plots on their land. For more information about the scheme, contact sarah.gelpke@rspb.org.uk

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