



giving
nature
a home

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

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654

Editor Felicity Jenkins

NEWSLETTER

January 2024

Vale of White Horse Local Group

A Happy New Year from the committee to everyone in the Vale of White Horse local group.

From the Editor

Perhaps you too have some new year's resolutions about wildlife observation: I'm planning to be systematic about recording the first date I spot migrant birds or butterflies locally, and shall take the Merlin app out in spring to sort out those tricky warblers.

Autumn was notable for North American vagrants blown to the UK by Atlantic hurricanes; the RSPB recorded 60 species, and on our field trip to Lincolnshire in September some of the group were lucky enough to see three rarities.

Here we're all trying to spot the White-rumped Sandpiper at RSPB Frampton Marsh. The reserve had a lot of visitors.



© Felicity Jenkins

RSPB photographer Ben Andrews captured a great image of the Lesser Yellowlegs at Frampton Marsh (below). We had a good view of it too, from one of the hides.



© Ben Andrews [rspb-images.com](https://www.rspb-images.com)

But unfortunately for me, the Black Stork by the salt marsh was another instance of 'oh you should have been here 20 minutes ago'!

Photocompetition

Our speaker David Boag, 'The World of a Wildlife Photographer', judged the members' competition during the November 2023 meeting. Entries were of any species of wildlife, in keeping with the RSPB's broad remit of taking action for nature together; historically birds used to be the main focus.

First prize (the trophy and a year's free membership): Felicity Jenkins for rose sawfly larvae



Second prize: Felicity Jenkins for spider



Third prize: Bill Lester for Nuthatch



Copyright is with the authors. All the other entries are on the website

www.rspb-vwh.org.uk/2023/entries

Thanks to Mike Haddrell for organizing the competition.

Presentation in the River Room



© Bob Knight

Indoor Meetings Programme for 2024

We look forward to an interesting series of evening talks and weekend field trips again in 2024. Last year meetings held as a mixture of in-person and Zoom presentations proved successful, so we will continue with winter talks all on Zoom, and hybrid talks both online and in the River Room with refreshments, as the evenings grow lighter.

26-28 January

Big Garden Birdwatch

15 January 2024

Zoom only meeting; members will receive a link a few days beforehand.

Prof Andrew Gosler (University of Oxford Department of Biology): A Guided Walk from Ornithology to Ethno-ornithology

Prof Gosler studies human engagement with birds, especially in the context of nature conservation and policy. He is a council member of BTO and a vice-president of the Oxford Ornithological Society

19 February 2024

Zoom only meeting; members will receive a link a few days beforehand.

Mike Pollard: Curlew Recovery in the Upper Thames

Breeding curlew numbers have fallen dramatically in recent years. Mike led a project to halt the decline of curlews and other waders across the Upper

Thames, involving many organisations including RSPB, BBOWT, Natural England, the Environment Agency, River Thame Conservation Trust and Banbury Ornithological Society.

18 March 2024

Ian Barthorpe: The Pantanal Tropical Wetlands

Hybrid presentation, on the big screen at the River Room where refreshments will be served, and on a link to members.

Last year, Ian entertained us with his travels across southern Africa. This year, he's off to the Pantanal wetlands of South America, and will Zoom in to tell us about it.

15 April 2024

Jerry Pride: The World of Swifts

Live meeting at the River Room where refreshments will be served. There is no Zoom link for this evening.

Swifts can fly up to 800 km a day, and spend almost their entire life on the wing, sometimes flying non-stop for three years. It wouldn't be summer without them, but these remarkable birds are in serious decline.

20 May 2024

AGM

Mark Bradfield: the Letcombe Brook Project.

Live meeting at the River Room, without a Zoom link. Refreshments will be served after a short AGM.

Letcombe Brook, much loved by local people, is a chalk stream that runs from Letcombe Regis to East Hanney, providing water for local use today. It is home to protected species such as white-clawed crayfish and water voles. Chalk streams are globally rare, so the Letcombe Brook Project was set up in April 2003 to enhance and protect the natural beauty of the Brook.

Report on field trips 2023

September weekend in Lincolnshire by Tim Pett

A party of 12 local group members spent a very enjoyable and productive weekend in Lincolnshire 22-24 September. We visited Rutland Water on the way on Friday, Frampton Marsh on Saturday and Ouse Washes on the way back on Sunday. There was also an early risers trip to Freiston Shore before breakfast on Saturday.

Frampton Marsh produced a particularly wide range of species including three rarities, a White-rumped Sandpiper, a Lesser

Yellowlegs and a Black Stork. I would like to thank Pat Philips and Steve Cload for giving me the details of the excellent hotel that we used in Boston. They had planned to run a similar trip in 2020 which unfortunately had to be cancelled because of Covid.

Species list by Martin Latham.

Mute Swan, Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Egyptian Goose, Shelduck, Ruddy Shelduck, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Shoveler, Pheasant, Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Little Egret, Great White Egret, Grey Heron, Black Stork, Red Kite, Marsh Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Kestrel, Peregrine, Water Rail, Moorhen, Coot, Crane, Avocet, Ringed Plover, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Knot, Little Stint, White-rumped Sandpiper, Dunlin, Ruff, Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Green Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Greenshank, Redshank, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Feral Pigeon, Stock Dove, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark, Swallow, House Martin, Meadow Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Stonechat, Blackbird, Cetti's Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Magpie, Jackdaw, Rook, Carrion Crow, Starling, House Sparrow, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Siskin, Linnet, Reed Bunting (88 species).

October: Days Lock

by Martin Latham

Eleven members met at Little Wittenham on 22 October with a view to walking along the Thames Path and investigating the scrape recently excavated by the Earth Trust as part of their River of Life project.



© Andy King

On approaching Day's Lock we were aware of two birds in particular - a Cormorant that took off from the river with a great flurry of wings and a Kingfisher that very obligingly posed for us in a nearby bush. Also present nearby were a Grey Heron, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Red Kites,

Buzzards, a Kestrel, Pied Wagtails, Goldfinches, Linnets, Yellowhammers and Reed Buntings.

The highlight of the trip was undoubtedly the time we spent at the scrape.

Here we were able to compare a Great White Egret, Little Egrets and Cattle Egrets in the same field of view. Seeing all three species side by side really is quite an instructive experience!



© Andy King



© Andy King

The scrape was also host to a party of wing-drying Cormorants, a very energetic flock of Teal and numerous Mallards and Moorhens.

The nearby fields produced flocks of Skylarks and Meadow Pipits and we enjoyed multiple sightings of Stonechats in the hedgerows and riverside vegetation. A couple of very vocal Ravens treated us to a spectacular fly-over as they cronked overhead. Rather less keen to be seen were the Siskins we heard calling from time to time.

Other birds seen or heard include Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Grey Wagtail, Fieldfare, Chiffchaff, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch, Jay and Lesser Redpoll, bringing the day's tally to 52 species.

November Farmoor Reservoir by Mike Haddrell

Ten members met at Farmoor on 26 November. Dry and cloudy to start; we were spared the forecasters' early morning mist and the Eleven O' Clock chilly drizzle did not deter us. A pair of Great Crested Grebes briefly practised their mating rituals; the numbers of Little Grebe were a highlight; the sewage beds failed to deliver Black Redstart and we spent quite some time monitoring a distant Greater Scaup as it made its way through a flotilla of Coot. Pinkhill gave

us Moorhen, Cetti's Warbler and Long-tailed Tits.

Shrike Meadow was the stage for a very persistent squirrel on one of the feeders, a Goldcrest and a possible calling Siskin. One of our number saw the Bullfinch's fleeting white along a hedgerow and good numbers of Fieldfare and a solitary Redwing boosted the day list as we prepared to leave. All the gulls were singles seen by at least one of the group. The Great Black-backed was seen through the scope on a buoy far across the other side of the water, but the blackness of the black left Baltic Gull as the only possible alternative. A total of 34 species were seen or heard, a respectable list for the time of year.



© Felicity Jenkins

Field Trips 2024

The organizer is Martin Latham (martinj.latham@googlemail.com). Please check up to date information for field trips on the website or facebook page.

We hope to plan another weekend away in the autumn, please contact Tim Pett if interested

(timothygpett@gmail.com)

21 January 2024

Port Meadow

Meet at 10 am at Walton Well Road car park (charges apply).

28 February 2024

Radley Lakes

Meet 10am at far end of Barton Lane (off Audlett Drive) OX14 3NB.



Thrupp Lake © Felicity Jenkins

24 March 2024

Arne RSPB Reserve Dorset

Meet in reserve car park BH20 5BJ.

21 April 2024

Otmoor RSPB reserve

Meet on site Otmoor Lane OX3 9UR. Remember your RSPB membership card for free parking.

26 May 2024

Whelford Pools, Cotswolds Water Park Gloucestershire (between Fairford and Lechlade).

Meet in reserve car park GL7 4EH(SU 172995).

9 June 2024

Greenham Common

for nightjars and woodcock. Meet at 8pm in Bury's Bank car park at the junction of Greenham road and Pinchington Lane.

The Oxon birding blog

The Oxon birding blog oxonbirding.blogspot.com is a marvellously informative record, updated daily, about recent bird sightings in Oxfordshire. Some sites are monitored regularly, so the blog gives good ideas about places to visit, what species are likely to be seen in your local area, and as a bonus, the blog often features photographs.

There is also a blog for Berkshire, berksbirds.co.uk, which covers the area south of the M4.

RSPB AGM

The RSPB AGM was held in October on Zoom. Taking action for nature together. Protecting habitats, saving species and helping to end the nature and climate emergency. Nature is in crisis. Together we can save it. These are slogans of the RSPB today. Presenters at the AGM described the many and diverse activities of the RSPB in engaging the public. Twelve million viewers watched Wild Isles, the BBC TV series co-produced by the RSPB, WWF and Open University and much of the footage was filmed on RSPB reserves. As well as highlighting the beauty of our wild landscapes, Wild Isles also showed how increasingly fragmented and fragile they have become, and what we need to do to protect them. The series started a 'Save our Wild Isles' project, part of which is an excellent youth-produced film 'Our Beautiful Wild'. Aimed at a teenage audience it has an immediate impact and deserves to be widely seen; 20 minutes long, it is on YouTube. There are 222 nature reserves in the British Isles, and entry has recently been made free for 16-25 year olds to encourage more visitors. Educational work on natural history with the Girl Guides is reaching hundreds of teenagers in England. In 2022 eight Bee-eaters nested in Norfolk; the RSPB put a nest cam at the protected site and 15,000 people were able to

visit.

Ongoing campaigns are combating river pollution, driven shooting of game birds, invasive non-native species on islands, and industrial sand eel fishing. Working with international partners the RSPB is helping to protect Tigers in Sumatra and Saiga Antelope in Kazakhstan.

And a small local difference can be made by subscribing to the RSPB online (available from January 2024); this will save a huge amount of paper! (rspb.org.uk)

Birding in South Africa:

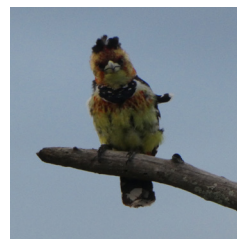
Lilac-breasted Roller and Crested Barbet by Mike Haddrell

When I was little I collected Brook Bond Tea Cards and I've still got the Tropical Birds set.



© Mike Haddrell

Some of the colouring is a bit dodgy and the Crested Barbet was then called Levallant's Barbet (I'm sure it's the same bird) - maybe an early switch in the current trend against naming birds after people.



Crested barbet © Mike Haddrell

We saw four of the 50-card set. Double-collared Sunbird at Umkumbe Lodge, Sabi Sands. Bateleur Eagle and African Fish Eagle were the other two, and the Lesser Double-collared Sunbird showed up in Cape Town. The Barbet was one of eight lifers on a bird trip list of 72. We also saw 35 mammals, reptiles and amphibians.



Lilac-breasted Roller © Mike Haddrell

Committee members 2024

There are still vacancies for programme organizer and for general committee members; please contact Bob Knight if you would like to be involved

bob_knight@tiscali.co.uk

.Group leader: Bob Knight

Secretary: Peter Williams

Treasurer :Katie Davis

Membership: Tim Pett

Indoor Programme:vacant

Field trips: Martin Latham

Media: Mike Haddrell

Webmaster: Malcolm Ross

Newsletter: Felicity Jenkins

Sales table: Gillian Taylor

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