



a million voices for nature

## THE RSPB LANCASTER LOCAL GROUP NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the Spring 2012 RSPB Lancaster Local Group Newsletter. We hope you have enjoyed your wildlife watching over the winter period and that you will join us over the coming months for our programme of spring and summer outings.

In this newsletter we have an article from John Wilson about the successful nest boxes for pied flycatchers in the Lune valley. We also have our usual news from Leighton Moss, with good news about the bitterns, with a male booming in March. A warm welcome to Carol Tresadern, the RSPB Local Groups Officer for our area, who provides us with information on what her job entails. I have also contributed a short article about my "Stepping Up for Nature". If anyone would like to let us know about their own "Stepping Up", we will include it either in the next newsletter or on our website.

If you would like to contribute a short article, or have any interesting wildlife news from your local patch, please email your contribution for the next RSPB Lancaster Local Group Newsletter to [kenharrison\\_1@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:kenharrison_1@yahoo.co.uk) no later than September 30<sup>th</sup> 2012.

*Ken Harrison – Newsletter Editor*

### ***Programme Notes April 2012***

At the start of February I held the hope that we would be spared from the icy grip of winter. After all, the daffodils in my garden were already in bud and likewise a coal tit would occasionally sing from a nearby cypress tree. My delusion of a warmer winter was however soon shattered. A week later the soil in my garden was now rock hard after a succession of frosts and inside the house it was time for me to crank-up the central heating.

Unfortunately our local wild birds do not have such a convenient option for keeping warm and ultimately surviving these bleak winter months. I therefore like to think that the small but thriving colony of house sparrows that live at the back of my property are helped by me keeping my bird feeders well stocked, together with an accessible (i.e. unfrozen) supply of drinking water. A small step such as keeping one's garden bird table in good order is just one of the many ways, (including volunteering for your Local Group) whereby we can give nature a helping hand, this is the very essence of the Society's current campaign entitled "Stepping Up for Nature". If you would like further details about this campaign they can be found by visiting the following:

[rspb.org.uk/steppingup](http://rspb.org.uk/steppingup) or alternatively, for Local Group volunteering you may contact our Local Groups Officer, Carol Tresadern. Carol can be contacted by telephone on 01524 851003 or by emailing [carol.tresadern@rspb.org.uk](mailto:carol.tresadern@rspb.org.uk)

Our 2012 programme of events is now well under way. In early January, several members enjoyed a day's birdwatching in the Fylde area centred around Marton Mere. On February 8<sup>th</sup> our own Ken Harrison took us to the land of the polar bear and walrus with his illustrated talk entitled "Spitsbergen – a Polar Cruise", this presentation was well attended and much appreciated. The ever popular film show by Gordon Yates – an annual event for the past thirty years, was held on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. This year the title of Gordon's film was "40 Years of Pennine Birding". Looking ahead to April 28<sup>th</sup> you are invited to take part in a springtime walk in Hindburndale, and then in May there

are three quite varied events; a visit to the north harbour wall at Heysham (4<sup>th</sup> May), the Dawn Chorus morning at Leighton Moss (6<sup>th</sup> May) and a chance to see some birds of the Lake District when we meet at Cow Bridge, Brotherswater on the 12<sup>th</sup> May. Full details of these events are on the Local Group website and members' programmes.

Finally, just to let you know that for general correspondence with us, your local group now has its own e-mail address: [rspblancaster@gmail.com](mailto:rspblancaster@gmail.com)

*Michael Gardner - Local Group Secretary*

### ***Local Groups Officer***

Many thanks to Ken for inviting me to write and introduce myself. I'm Carol Tresadern, and I'm the Local Groups Officer for Northern England. You may not be aware, but each local group is run **entirely** by volunteers. Volunteers have always been the bedrock of the RSPB since its early beginnings, and all the regions and countries within the RSPB have Volunteer Development Officers (or similar), who coordinate the work of all our volunteers, and make sure that the contribution of volunteers remains relevant and necessary to the function of the RSPB.

As the Northern region is so large, this work is split between two people – myself and Josie Fowler (who is covering for Kirsten Whittaker whilst Kirsten is on maternity leave). Josie covers all the non-local group volunteers and also five of the groups, and I work with the remaining 28 groups. There are many ways that people can contribute to their local group, either as a committee member or as a group volunteer. A recent survey shows that our volunteers get a huge amount of satisfaction from volunteering with us. As a volunteer myself, before becoming a member of staff, I can vouch for the feeling of being welcomed and valued, and knowing that whatever I've done benefits birds and the environment in some way. We have opportunities for people to do anything from 'micro-volunteering' (perhaps sending an email, or writing a comment on a blog), to using their professional skills and experience, and everything in between! In the Lancaster Local Group we are currently looking for more people to join the Committee (and I'm also looking for someone to take photos of their local group in action!). If you want to have a say in how your group is run, or have ideas or skills you can contribute, please do get in touch. One of our current members is sure to be able to 'take you under their wing'!

*Carol Tresadern, Local Groups Officer*

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### ***Stepping Up for Nature***



I am sure you will all be aware of the RSPB's "Stepping Up for Nature" campaign, with the Spring 2012 issue of the RSPB's Birds magazine containing short articles from several people on how they are Stepping Up. In fact, Alasdair Grubb, our new Assistant Warden at Leighton Moss, is one of those contributors! I thought you may also like to know how I am Stepping Up!

My own interest in nature began when I moved to the area in

1978 and I was hooked when I first visited Leighton Moss and saw my first bittern in 1980 (*bittern*

*photo © Ken Harrison*). I was encouraged in my early birdwatching by attending a Workers Educational Association course run by John Wilson. It was there I met and became friends with John Bateman, the late Tom Marshall, and a young David Bateson (now an RSPB warden at South Stack on Anglesey). I soon joined our RSPB Lancaster Local Group and also Lancaster and District Birdwatching Society. I edited the LDBWS Annual Report for many years and also its Breeding Bird Atlas. I also set up the first LDBWS website. For the past few years I have edited the local group newsletter and website, plus leading a few of our field outings and giving my recent Spitsbergen talk. I also do survey work for LDBWS, BTO and the RSPB and will soon be enjoying walks along the Lancaster Canal for my BTO Waterways Breeding Bird Survey and also the North West Mute Swan Survey. Since taking early retirement just over a year ago I have also started helping with the Wednesday guided walks at Leighton Moss, which is very enjoyable and gives me a chance to pass on some of my knowledge to visitors. I also continue to pick up useful snippets of natural history from the other volunteers helping with the walks, such as John Webb, and realise how limited my knowledge is about the plants, fungi and insects at Leighton Moss!  
*Ken Harrison*

### *The Pied Flycatcher in the Lune Valley*

It may come as something of a surprise to many of today's birdwatchers that as recently as 1965 there was only one breeding record of Pied Flycatchers nesting in the Lune valley and that was in 1895 near Halton!

In 1966 a nest box scheme was started in Roeburndale and two pairs nested. Numbers of nest boxes were increased so that by 1983 13 pairs were nesting. The population continued to increase as further nest boxes were installed in more woods and by the early 1990's the population had levelled out to about 50 pairs.

In recent years the North Lancashire Ringing Group, with the financial support of the Lancaster RSPB, has taken over the running of the scheme and further extended it to ten other woods. This has been most successful and the population has continued to increase to a record 93 pairs in 2011, of which 76 successfully produced young, with 455 nestlings being ringed. The main increase occurred in some of the more outlying woods. Those at Whittington and Barbon were typical. In previous years only two pairs had nested, but in 2011 five pairs nested in each wood.

This increase has occurred against a background of declining numbers elsewhere in the country, so much so that it is now on the amber list of birds of conservation concern.

Our ringing has shown some interesting results this year. For the first time we proved that a pair could rear two broods in a season. In two woods a ringed male was feeding young in two adjacent boxes. Working overtime I think!

Many other species such as Blue, Great, Coal and Marsh Tits and Nuthatch use the boxes. There is no doubt that without the nest boxes the population of all these species would decline, as the Lune valley oak woods have very few natural holes.

The boxes have been made by Paul Robinson, an RSPB member from Kendal. He gives his services free, so we only have to pay for materials. The scheme has now reached the stage where almost all the suitable woodlands have nest boxes and it is not intended to extend any further. However nest boxes have a limited life and we need about 50 nest boxes each year to replace those falling into disrepair. This year the cost will be £90, which has again been met by the RSPB Lancaster Local Group. We are really grateful for your support for this worthwhile and highly successful project.

*John Wilson*

## ***News from RSPB Leighton Moss nature reserve***

### **Wildlife Highlights**

Mild weather over the winter has meant that bittern sightings have been less frequent than last year, although the odd cold snap provided visitors with views of as many as five birds at once. Indeed, the same mild weather is perhaps the reason why, for the first time, four marsh harriers over-wintered on the reserve.

Our resident otters were showing well late last year and early this year, and in greater numbers than in previous years. Up to five were seen together, throughout the day, causing much excitement among the staff, volunteers and visitors.

Great excitement was also caused when a glossy ibis appeared on Silverdale Golf Course in mid-December (*glossy ibis photo* © Ken Harrison). Since then it seems to have taken a shine to the fields just off the reserve, although it has been coming onto the reserve to roost with the little egrets at night, and seen from Griesdale hide on several occasions.



Since spring has sprung over the

past few weeks, many of our favourites have returned. The first chiffchaffs have been heard around the reedbed, and the first wheatears have been reported on the saltmarsh. The first avocets arrived back at the end of February, and up to 10 have been seen out on the saltmarsh. Let's hope they have a fantastic season.

Much excitement was caused mid-March by the bittern beginning to boom. He was first heard early one morning by David Mower, down at the bottom of the causeway. The bittern gave 15 sessions of loud grunting over half an hour, with 5 good, loud grunts per session. Since then, he has tuned up, and is being heard booming in the evenings and early mornings. Along with the booming, Robin Horner was out one Saturday evening on the causeway and he had 3 bitterns flying round over his head, gull calling! There have also been fairly regular sightings of bitterns reported at Griesdale hide. All this makes the season look very promising.

### **Staff Changes**

Since December, we have had a number of staff changes at the reserve. We were very sad to lose one of our Assistant Wardens, Catherine Owen-Pam. She left us in mid-December to move up to live with her partner in Inverness. She has now got a job monitoring Slavonian grebes at RSPB Loch Ruthven, as well as wardening work around our Invernesshire reserves. We wish her the best of luck in her new role.

In mid-March, we welcomed Alasdair Grubb to the team, to replace Catherine. Many of you will already have met Alasdair, as he was one of our warden interns last summer. He has spent the winter months finishing his internship at RSPB Coombes Valley before landing his dream job as Assistant Warden here. Alasdair brings with him energy and enthusiasm along with a passion for wildlife and excellent practical skills.

As many of you know, Jen Walker, our much loved Visitor and Publicity Officer left us on a 6 month secondment from the beginning of February. Jen has taken up the role of Scotland's

Volunteering Officer, covering someone's maternity leave. She is based at our Scottish HQ in Edinburgh. We hope Jen enjoys the challenge of this new post, and look forward to her return later this year

Annabel Rushton, our existing Membership Development Officer, has taken up the Visitor and Publicity Officer role for 6 months whilst Jen is away. We have therefore, welcomed Lesley Johnson to the team as our new Membership Development Assistant, covering Annabel's post for 6 months. Many of you will have met Lesley, as she has been one of our top recruiting volunteers in the visitor centre over the past 12 months, and brings with her a wealth of experience from her days as an IT trainer, as well as a great passion for wildlife and Leighton Moss.

Finally, we said a sad goodbye to our Retail Manager, Lindsay White, in early February. Lindsay has expertly managed our shop for the past 2 years. She has taken on a new post with the National Trust as an Area Manager and will be sorely missed. We wish her well in her new role.

Lindsay is to be replaced by a familiar face in the form of Emma Jones, our previous Retail Manager. Emma is returning to us after 2 years away, for part of which she lived in Cyprus. Emma will start on the 2nd April, and we are very excited to have her back in the team.

*Annabel Rushton*

*The opinions expressed by the contributors to this Newsletter are not necessarily those of the RSPB or of the RSPB Lancaster Local Group.*

**<http://www.rspb.org.uk/groups/lancaster/>**

The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment.

Nature is amazing - help us keep it that way.

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