Latest News

The end of another year is on the horizon, with any luck Santa will have filled your stocking and hopefully reindeer droppings are no longer clogging up the gutter.

It has been an interesting 12 months. We started off 2015 with our New Year car outing to Abberton and Tollesbury on a grey and misty day. Despite poor visibility 60 species were seen. We had our usual local walks and monthly indoor meetings and the ever popular Quiz in February but had to wait until April for our first coach outing of the year to Rutland Water, with February's annual coach trip to Holkham and Titchwell and the March outing to the birdwatchers mecca; Cley-next-the-Sea, cancelled due to low numbers. April also saw Terry Smith step down as Group Leader after completing 10 years, with Ron Hodgson metaphorically stepping into Terry's shoes. At the AGM Ron presented Terry and Ann with a painting, created by local artist Ernie Leahy, of Seventy Acres Lake at Fishers Green with some of the birds that can be seen there and included the Red-footed Falcon found by Terry and Ann in 2008.

May started out with the Group Weekend in Dorset with visits to Durlston Country Park, Lodmoor and Portland Bill. Again we saw the cancellation of yet another coach outing, this time to Rye Harbour.

June had the last coach outing of the season to Minsmere and rather surprising, despite this wonderful RSPB reserve being 'advertised' on the BBC’s “Springwatch”, only 23 people booked their seat on the coach. The final event of the 2014/15 programme was a Local Walk at Connaught Water in Epping Forest.

The 2015/16 season began in September with our indoor meeting and Jan Klapwijk informing us of “Where the Wild Things Are” a talk on the Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust's work protecting Hertfordshire's wildlife and habitats.

A busy October opened with the first Local Walk on the new programme led by Jonathan Forgham around his local patch near Little Hadham. Phil Blatcher again organised the Short Break Holiday in North Norfolk and the first coach outing of the season found us at Dungeness in Kent where Great Grey Shrike was the star bird.

“Magical Mallorca” was the topic for Chris Ward's talk at the end of this month.

In November we had a car trip to the Brecks and the National Trust's reserve at Burwell Fen and at the indoor meeting, David Darrell-Lambert entertained us with his light-hearted analysis of waders and how to tell them apart.

For the final month of the year, we had the all day Local Walk at Amwell and Rye Meads and 2015 was rounded off by the Christmas Group Meeting with various festivities and the Grand Christmas Draw.
The Brecks and Burwell Fen

Nine supporters joined Derrick Ling for this car trip to the Brecks and Burwell Fen on a rather cold but dry Sunday. A good variety of woodland birds including 10 crossbills and some very bright siskins were seen at Lynford Arboretum, although the visit to Santon Downham proved to be a little quieter. The latter part of the day was spent at Burwell Fen, a new site for the S.E. Herts Group, this produced the hoped for short-eared and barn owls, and for some a ring-tail hen harrier. Also at Burwell were large numbers of starlings and jackdaws coming in to roost. See the full report on our website.

Wednesday Walk

During Terry Smith’s tenure as Group Leader he organised a once a month, mid-week fundraising walk around his local patch. The “Wednesday Walk” proved very popular as a pleasant social gathering with a morning stroll around sites in the Lee Valley. The original members felt it was a shame to abandon this enjoyable little jaunt just because Terry had left the area, so they still get together every month for a morning's bird watching. And so it was, that 15 Wednesday Walkers gathered at Hooks Marsh car park for a leisurely amble up to Hall Marsh Scrape and Bowyers Water. The early rain soon cleared to leave a pleasant sunny day. There were various birding highlights throughout the walk including: a Peregrine Falcon on the pylons, one or two obliging Lesser Redpolls feeding low down on weed seeds instead of high up in the alders and a male Stonechat, which as Andy Johnson’s excellent photo illustrates, gave everyone exceptional views at Hall Marsh Scrape. For further details of the Wednesday Walks reply to this email, c/o Geoff Brown.

Indoor Group Meeting

It was a welcome return of David Darrell-Lambert to the Group for his talk on “Wading Through Waders”. A tricky group of birds for beginners and experts alike. David’s amusing and light-hearted talk concentrated on various confusion species such as Whimbrel and Curlew, the two Godwits and the “shanks” as well as comparing the ubiquitous Dunlin with its numerous doppelgangers. His use of split screens to show similar species side by side and captions to illustrate differences in leg length, eye stripes, wing bars etc. were used to great effect and I am sure we all went away a little wiser. Several items were purchased at the 'bring and buy' sale during the evening and the cheque for first prize for the 100 Club draw went to Mrs Proud with Miss Norris in second place.
Full Day Local Walk HMWT
Amwell & RSPB Rye Meads

A total of 11 members supported the December Local Walk, visiting Amwell Nature Reserve in the morning and Rye Meads in the afternoon. The main highlights of the day were at Amwell, starting off with a pair of Goldeneye seen from the Gladwin Hide. The woodland held a small flock of active Siskins, a Red Kite put in an appearance and a very obliging male Kestrel provided photo opportunities for some. Although the best was saved until last; the local regulars had found an adult Caspian Gull, which was considerate enough to perch in full view on one of the 'goalposts' in front of the viewpoint.

Rye Meads however was a little quieter. Nevertheless a fly-by Green Sandpiper was seen from the Lapwing Hide during lunch and two, normally secretive, Snipe were out on the gravel islands in front of the Gadwall Hide.

See the full report on our website.

Christmas Group Meeting

The final event of the year was the Christmas Group Meeting. Barrie Stockwell's talk on Ethiopia was well received as was the fun quiz. Everyone ate, drank and made merry courtesy the 'bring 'n share' supper. A spot of festive gambling was also on the menu with the 100 Club, the Grand Christmas Draw and the 'lucky' raffle. Congratulations go to Julie Paice & Ted Bell, the 100 Club winners, and to everyone who won prizes in the Grand Christmas Draw, which raised just over £1,000 for the RSPB. And for their many years service with the Group, Ted and Rosie Bell were awarded long service volunteering badges presented by Group Leader Ron Hodgson.

There are still numbers available for the 100 Club. Contact Geoff Brown: 01992 468031 or see Geoff at the meetings.

Car trip to EWT Abberton Reservoir & Tollesbury
Saturday 9th January

Our annual New Year trip. Starting off at Abberton then on to Tollesbury (toilets) for lunch. Last year 60sp were found by the group. The huge expanse of Essex & Suffolk Water's Abberton Reservoir is one of Europe's top wetland sites. It is of international importance as a safe haven for wild ducks, swans and other water birds, whether resident, passing through on migration or over-wintering.

At Tollesbury Wick wildlife is abundant in rough pasture, borrowdykes, seawalls, wet flushes, pools and saltmarsh. Large areas of rough pasture suit small mammals such as Field Voles and Pygmy Shrew. In addition, they in turn attract hunting Hen Harriers and Short-eared Owls.

Your leader for this trip is Barrie Stockwell. Meet by 9.30am on the Layer Breton causeway, Abberton, off B1026 (OS168 TL950165) Don't forget your packed lunch!

PLEASE NOTE: In case of any changes to the travel arrangements, it is essential to check with Barrie Stockwell before joining any car outing, tel: 01992 584133

http://www.essexwt.org.uk/reserves/abberton-reservoir
http://www.essexwt.org.uk/reserves/tollesbury-wick

Indoor Group Meeting
Tuesday 26th January

We welcome back local photographer Tom Mason, with his talk on 'Wild Britain' including birds, seals, deer, water voles and foxes. Tom
will also show some wildlife photos taken on his trips this year, hopefully including bear, moose and eagles.

Time: doors open at 7.30pm for 8.00pm start.
Price: RSPB members £2.50, non-members £3.00. Refreshments are available during the interval.

Morning Walk at Fishers Green
Saturday 6th February

Fishers Green is well known for its winter specialities and the aptly named Bittern Information Point is one of the best places to see this denizen of the reedbeds and there is always chance of a Kingfisher or Water Rail putting in an appearance in front of the hide. The Lee Valley is also a reliable site for Smew, with small numbers often seen on Seventy Acres Lake and Hooks Marsh at this time of year.

Meet by 9.30am in Fishers Green car park, your leader for this walk is Ted Bell.

A local walk may be cancelled at the discretion of the walk leader if the weather is very bad, please take this into consideration before joining any walk.

Annual General Knowledge Quiz
Saturday 6th February

Unusually we have two events on the same day; the Local Walk in the morning and one of our most popular events of the year, the Annual General Knowledge Quiz in the evening. £72 for a table of 8, supper included but bring your own drinks. 7pm for 7.15pm start. Tickets are available from Toby Spencer, Tel: 01920 822177 or at the Group Meetings.

Outing Leaders Wanted

You will notice occasionally on the printed programme and website that some of the outings have "Leader – TBA", To Be Announced. Although we have a number of members who regularly lead trips it can sometimes be difficult to commit to dates months in advance, therefore arranging a leader could be a last minute thing. So! Would you be interested in leading one of our trips?

"Hold on, you’ve got to be kidding!" I hear you say, "I struggle identifying waders, warblers all look the same to me and 'little brown jobs' forget it. Why would you be asking me?"

No problem! What we are saying is: do you think you could coordinate, for example, one of our Coach Outings? With modern technology readily available, organising trips are easier now than they have ever been. Instant communication via mobile phones, satellite navigation systems that take you right to the doorstep, internet access providing you with information regarding the site and "What's about?" websites for up to date bird sightings. You can even check tide tables online to make best use of your time at coastal reserves. As for identifying the wildlife; there are many experienced birders in the group who regularly lead walks when on site. Minsmere, for instance, may require three or four separate guided groups. Coach trips such as Holkham & Titchwell have been regular outings for many years and organising these trips have become almost routine. Therefore, if you have access to a computer, own a mobile phone and are able to count up to 40, you can probably lead one of our outings.

If you are interested, contact the Group Leader, Ron Hodgson, by replying to this email.

Check the Group's website for updates of our events:
www.rspb.org.uk/groups/southeasthertfords
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