Update on the Macclesfield Big Bird Box Build - Children Building For Nature.

Macclesfield RSPB Wildlife Explorers have spent the last month campaigning to raise £500 to fund a selection of bird box kits for local children to make. Different box designs will cater for a range bird species and the boxes will be installed in locations across the Macclesfield area including Cheshire Wildlife Trust’s Danes Moss Nature Reserve.

The Macclesfield Big Bird Box Build has generated lots of interest - Local Press and Social media have covered our campaign and we have had an incredible amount of positive feedback from the local community. As we go to Press we are delighted to confirm that we expect to exceed our original fundraising target. Although the JustGiving page online closes this week, the campaign will continue to gratefully accept donations until the end of March to accommodate an even broader vision for the scope of our project.

The team behind the fundraising campaign have been in talks with a range of other organisations and will now also be constructing nestboxes to be put up in additional local beauty spots as well as a selection of central Macclesfield locations. Further updates will be published on the Wildlife Explorers website [www.macclesfieldrspb.org.uk](http://www.macclesfieldrspb.org.uk), the Macclesfield RSPB Wildlife Explorers Facebook page and on Twitter @MaccWildlife.

**Please give a warm welcome to Philip Snow our speaker tonight**

Philip is a wildlife artist, book illustrator and writer. His illustrations are found in scores of books (including several *Collins Field Guides*) and magazines, prints, cards, maps and leaflets and in several major National, Royal and Private collections. His latest books include *Light and Flight – Hebridean Wildlife and Landscape Sketchbook*; *Design and Origin of Birds*, and *Tall Tales from an Estuary*, which documents the busy wildlife of the Malltraeth Estuary in Anglesey, where he lives (next door to Tunnicliffe’s ‘Shorelands’!).

**Doing Stuff Table**

We have pleasure in welcoming two well known and highly experienced local naturalists as guests this evening, Bridget Self and Jack Swan. They have kindly agreed to be at the 'Doing Stuff' table during the break to answer any questions you may have on invertebrates. Now is your chance to ask everything you’ve always wanted to know about hoverflies, bees or any other flying creepy crawly critter.
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<th>Date</th>
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<td>Sunday 21</td>
<td><strong>Outdoor Meeting: Wigan Area</strong>&lt;br&gt;A search for winter thrushes, grebes and sawbills.&lt;br&gt;Meet at Duke Street car park at 9:00 am for an all day visit&lt;br&gt;Leader: Abercrombie 07842 912094</td>
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<td>Thursday 3</td>
<td><strong>Special Event: RSPB Coffee Morning</strong>&lt;br&gt;Enjoy a cup of tea or coffee with biscuits at Gawsworth Community Hall. A selection of homemade cakes, preserves and bird food will be available to purchase.&lt;br&gt;Gawsworth Methodist Community Hall, Congleton Road, Gawsworth, Macclesfield, SK11 9QZ, 10 am to 12 noon&lt;br&gt;Contact: Chris Revett 01625 617384</td>
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<td>Friday 4</td>
<td><strong>CAWOS Meeting: AGM followed by ‘Both Sides of Extinction’</strong> by Steve Briley&lt;br&gt;7:30 pm for a prompt 7:45 pm start at St. Vincents Roman Catholic Church, Tatton Street, Knutsford, WA16 6HR</td>
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<td>Tuesday 8</td>
<td><strong>Indoor Meeting: Pennine Wildlife</strong> by Tim Melling&lt;br&gt;Introduced by: Alan Brereton 01625 615628</td>
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<td>Sunday 13</td>
<td><strong>WGBG Coach Trip: Blacktoft Sands and Old Moor RSPB Reserves</strong>&lt;br&gt;Depart at 7:30 am from Wilmslow Guild, Bourne Street, Wilmslow, SK9 5HD&lt;br&gt;Contact: Steve McGann 01625 533652</td>
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<td>Sunday 20</td>
<td><strong>Outdoor Meeting: Cromford Wharf and Carsington Water</strong>&lt;br&gt;Join us for a visit to search for hawfinch around the trees at Matlock rugby ground before we move onto Carsington Water for the rest of the day. There are four hides dotted around Carsington Water, as well as some well stocked bird feeders to attract the woodland species. We hope to see the early returning warblers and sand martins plus we will search the water for specialist gulls (e.g. Mediterranean and yellow legged gulls) and great northern diver has regularly been seen at this time of year.&lt;br&gt;Café facilities are available at Carsington.&lt;br&gt;Meet at Duke Street car park at 8:00 am for an all day visit. Car Park fees are payable: £1.30 at the Wharf and £4.70 at Carsington Water.&lt;br&gt;Leader: Alan Brereton 01625 615628</td>
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**Write Away by Ray Perry**

I have written this piece to encourage you to consider writing for the group’s newsletter and / or annual magazine. Your editor, Ian Taylor, would like to hear from you if you can make an offering. As I’m sure you are aware, I have written very many over the last 10 years. Time for others to have a crack at the task!

Actually, it’s not difficult. Just write about what you know. Pick an episode from your past and get it down on paper or on your computer. The latter is best. If you have a computer, you can write it then email it to Ian. Try to keep to about one side of A4. If you run over, it doesn’t matter, as long as it’s not TOO much over! If you write about what you know, it doesn’t take very long. Honest! Currently I write about things from the past which, in some way are nature related, or I write a miscellany.

A miscellany traditionally is just a collection of short items that have no relation to one another. In
my case I write a list of items BUT I always have a thread running through of the natural world - that is birds, mammals, trees, flowers, insects, climate and the landscape. This is all very “RSPB”. In the past the RSPB only dealt with birds BUT now they realise that everything in the landscape is connected, thus the RSPB now design or modify their sites with this in mind. I head such a piece as a Miscellany or maybe Bits and pieces or perhaps Bits and bobs. You no doubt will have your own ideas.

The newsletter is a means of informing group members about what has happened, or about to happen, with the group or the RSPB in general. Thanks to Ian and Lydia we are told about former events and their outcome, current and future events plus learning about the many different activities that Tina Hanak’s Young Wildlife Explorers have been involved with. Ian, of course, edits the whole lot. These tasks are big jobs and we members are very grateful to them. I love it when other members write a piece. I’m always enthralled when David Beer writes for us. We need more like him so please consider having a go. If you want me to give you advice then just ask me.

Here are a few suggestions for starters: Use a snappy title if possible. One easy way to start is to write as you speak. You can organise your piece into beginning, middle and end. What this means is firstly introducing the subject or give some context, then tell your story using paragraphs as appropriate and finally wrap up the piece with some kind of conclusion. Sometimes I head the section with a one word title in bold, so that it stands out but bear in mind the general flow of the article. Well that’s enough “pontificating”. Go on, have a try: it’s easier than you think.

By the way, if you have an artistic bent, draw one or two pictures, in pen and black ink. If you cannot draw, ask Ian to supply a drawing from his RSPB collection of royalty free sketches, made by regular professional artists. Alternatively, ask me! I can draw anything! (Very cocky aren’t I?). Good luck!

Volunteer Long Service Awards by Ian Taylor

At the February meeting Rita Howard was presented with her 10 year Long Service Volunteer Award. Rita is pictured left receiving her Puffin Certificate and Silver Puffin pin badge from Ian Taylor. In the last 10 years Rita and her Community Fundraising Team have collected over £26,000 from public donations for pin badges at various locations in Macclesfield and the surrounding area.

Rita is held in very high esteem by her local committee and the RSPB Northern Region Office for the enthusiasm and organisation that she demonstrates while undertaking this very important role.

Vicky Lamb, Community Fundraiser and Rita’s main contact at RSPB Northern England wasn’t able to join us on the night but sent this message: ‘Rita, I want to share my thanks with you as you receive your 10 year Long Service Award and for how much you have raised for the RSPB over the years. Your support and passion for the RSPB, through the group and through your Pin Badge scheme really shines through. To hear that you have raised more than £25 000 over 10 years is an amazing success, a success that everyone will aspire too. Working with you has been a dream, I can always rely on you as a fundraiser and to offer help and advice. Thank you. I hope you have a fabulous evening tonight, you deserve this award.’

Separately, ten year, Long Service Volunteer Puffin Awards were also presented by Ray Evans to David and Ann Taylor at their home, Pikelow Farm for their wonderful support to the Group at our WOW events and for selling bird food.
Once again, the only way of describing last year’s weather was….changeable! Several UK records have again been broken and the relentless increase in mean average temperatures has continued. My own weather station in our back garden on Blakelow Road has given us a daily record of weather statistics which are interesting to compare with the Met Office national figures. 2015 was declared the warmest year since records began with a mean average of 8˚c, which was 4.1˚c above the long term average. The previous warmest year was 1988 with a mean average of 6.6˚c. Our own statistics show that last year we enjoyed an average temperature of 9.2˚c which was actually slightly cooler than 2014, at 9.8˚c, probably because last year’s summer months were consistently cooler than in 2014. It was November and particularly December that proved exceptionally mild last year, with another UK record falling with the warmest December ever at an average of 8˚c nationally and 8.4˚c in Macclesfield. Remarkably, no frosts were recorded anywhere in Wales or Central and Southern England during the whole of December, in fact a maximum temperature of 17.2˚c was recorded on 16 December at opposite ends of the country in Teignmouth Devon and Plockton in Highland Scotland, more like the temperature to be expected in April or May. Our own warmest day in December was 13.8˚c on the 19th. The hottest day for 2015 we had here in Macclesfield was on 1 July at 30.3˚c which also gave another UK record for July with a temperature of 36.7˚c at a sizzling Heathrow Airport. There were no spectacularly cold records broken last year with -13.7˚c at Loch Glascarnoch on 19 January which also gave us our coldest day but at a mere -3.7˚c, although this was slightly colder than our 2014 minimum of -1.7˚c.

However, it was of course the rain and floods that made the news at the end of last year. While it was Somerset that was hit by flooding in 2014, it was the turn of the North last year to receive more rain than ever. Having already had twice the average rainfall in November, the newly christened storms that swept across northern England in the guise of Desmond during 4-5, Eva 23-24 and Frank 29-31 December only added to the already saturated ground with devastating effect. The bare figures speak for themselves: 9.05” average rainfall across the UK making it the wettest December recorded despite lower than average rainfall in SE England and NE Scotland but it was what happened over Cumbria Yorkshire and Lancashire that sent the statistics soaring – a record 13.44” fell in 24hrs at Honister Pass during 5 December and 15.94” of rain over 2 days at Thirlmere reservoir caused serious damage and closure of the main Ambleside to Keswick road. While we here escaped the worst of the rain with a mere 4.81” in our back garden during December, not far away at Capel Curig in N Wales an incredible 39.84” fell in that month a normal average for the whole year in some parts of England! Then there was the unfortunate village of Eglwyswrw (Editor may need to provide a pronunciation guide—no chance!) in Pembrokeshire which had 82 consecutive days of rain from 26 October into the middle of January.

The photograph right, shows the scene at Patterdale, a short canoe ride down the road from Glenridding, (which was much in the news over Christmas and New Year, with the Glenridding Hotel being flooded 4 times), where the vehicle track to Side Farm near Ullswater was completely submerged when we were there at the end of December. The overall cost of the flood damage, as estimated by the Association of British Insurers, has been put at £1.3 billion. Those months of drought and hose pipe restrictions a few year’s ago, seem a dim and distant memory now!
News from our Wildlife Explorers

Feathered Friends: Wildlife Explorers prepared for the RSPB’s Big Garden Birdwatch at their January Indoor Meeting, Feathered Friends. Children gathered at The Salvation Army Hall on Roe Street to learn some basic garden bird identification skills and the way the valuable data collected in the survey is used to help conservation.

Children had a chance to try out using binoculars for an indoor birdwatching session using a collage with lots of hidden wildlife species to identify. Wildlife Explorers got creative making Bird of Prey Window decorations in a variety of realistic and abstract styles. Everyone also sculpted a bird - inspired pencil topper with robins and penguins proving the most popular selection (and perhaps the easiest to model?). Playing 'The Feather Game' helped to illustrate how vulnerable wild birds are to the simple decisions human beings make in relation to the environment.

Phoenix members took part in a special session learning about the evolution of birds and how their bodies are adapted for flight. As well as learning about feathers and wing morphology they also discussed the importance of pneumatised bones and skeleton structure. The group were all looking forward to testing out their new-found skills over the Garden Birdwatch weekend at the end of January.

Big Garden Birdwatch - Jackson Brickworks: Wildlife Explorers braved bitterly cold winds and snow showers to count the birds at Jackson’s Brickworks as part of the biggest wildlife survey in the world, The RSPB’s Big Garden Birdwatch.

The final bird list for the day was: blue tit 3; blackbird 1; carrion crow 4; chaffinch 4; coal tit 1; coot 1; great tit 2; greenfinch 2; jay 1; long-tailed tit 3; magpie 2; mistle thrush 2; robin 1; starling 11; wood pigeon 2; wren 1. Children also noted the following species flying over: jackdaw 2

Last year over half a million people spent just one hour over the Birdwatch weekend counting a staggering total of more than eight and a half million birds. The information that is collected by amateur birdwatchers in thousands of gardens across Britain provides a snapshot of the health of our garden bird populations and helps the RSPB identify conservation priorities for the future.
Health and Safety

In the event of fire or other emergency necessitating evacuation of the building, please leave in an orderly manner via the nearest available Emergency Exit or as instructed by a designated Committee member. Emergency Exits are indicated by the internationally recognised symbol of a ‘running man’ on a green background.

If required, there is a first aid kit in the kitchen. (If you do have an accident, however minor, while here tonight please report it directly to a Committee member who, amongst other things, will ensure that details are logged in the Accident Report Book.)