

## LOCAL BIRDER GETS A CENTURY!

No, that's not a reference to my inclusion in the England cricket team to boost their performance after the woeful showing in the recent tour but news that after four years of failure, I've finally managed 100 species in the first month of the year. Many year-listers set themselves targets and a century in January is a pretty common aim. I last achieved the total in 2009 when I reached 101, since then I fell just short with 99 in 2011 and this year I finished with a respectable 107.

It may sound rather nerdy and obsessive but it does get you out and about in the least appealing month. It's too easy to look at the weather and decide not to bother if it's anything other than bright and sunny. Having a target makes you pull on those cold wellies, the extra fleece, woollie hat and gloves and to get out there, bins in hand, carefully checking everything that moves. That's the other thing about having a target, it improves your observation skills. Among a flock of Goldfinches careful searching revealed a single Siskin, scanning through several hundred Lapwings at Whitemoor Hays I found one lonely Ruff. While hoping for Little Egret on the river just outside Kings Bromley a pale shape in a distant ploughed field caught my eye, binoculars didn't reveal its identity but the scope showed a female Peregrine perched on a furrow.

I've also picked up birds I've gone several years without seeing; Crossbills and Mandarin Duck on the Chase, a Great White Egret at Gailey, Bittern and Water Rail at London Wetland Centre, Glossy Ibis in Brownhills and a Long-tailed Duck and Scaup at Belvide. I wouldn't normally expect to tick off any warblers until March at the very earliest but several Chiffchaffs by the sewage works near Alrewas Pits and a female Blackcap on my garden feeder kept things moving.

Being extra vigilant I've also noticed slight changes as the days have slowly lengthened, snatches of bird song from song posts, territorial squabbling, pairing up, and carrying of nesting material.

So, nerdy it may be but at least it's kept the old legs and brain active and I'm well set for 200 for the year.

Bob

## CHASE MUSEUM EVENT

It would be churlish to complain about the rather wet conditions we've experienced since the beginning of the year; compared to other counties we get off lightly. However heavy rain did spoil the bird-watching walks we had planned as part of Chase Museums, *Big Bird Watch and Activities Day*.

The indoor activities went very well, a constant stream of parents and children made fat balls, stuck seeds in apples and cut out and coloured various animal masks, helped by RSPB staff and our own Sheila Nicholas. Meanwhile Dennis and I made two attempts to get a bird id walk going but were defeated by heavy rain. We compromised by setting up scopes near the activity room and pointing out birds coming to the previously set-up feeders. That worked well and plenty of children and adults had their first views of Goldfinches, Coal Tits and Bullfinch. Hopefully we inspired a few future birders and RSPB members.

## MONEY MATTERS

I realise there aren't many newsletters when money isn't mentioned but as you all realise it is the lifeblood of the RSPB and without regular income the essential work carried out by the charity would grind to a halt.

Last year our total contributions to RSPB funds was £1,547; £1000 donated from accumulated funds and £547 from pin badge sales. While this is a creditable amount and probably exceeds donations from many groups it does fall far short of the amounts donated by some groups but without a larger committee and much more time devoted to RSPB affairs we shall have to remain in the conference league rather than division one.

At a committee meeting last week we reviewed our financial situation and agreed that we could send a further donation of £1000 to HQ to be used at their discretion, as monies for some projects attract like for like funding from the Government.

In a recent circular from HQ about fundraising I noticed that recycling printer cartridges, mobile phones, digital cameras, sat navs and game consoles is suggested as a trouble free way of fund-raising. Since January 2005 £390,000 has been raised by this method. It has also diverted 24,000 kg of waste from landfill - a win win situation. I proposed and it was agreed that we adopt this scheme and have therefore requested a recycling box which will be at each indoor meeting ready for your offerings. **Spread the news to friends, neighbours and family to maximise the effort.**

Committee also agreed the purchase of an amplifier to enable us to show films using a laptop and the group's own digital projector. This will mean that we can show an appropriate wildlife film if a speaker doesn't turn up or the occasional programmed film thus saving the cost of a speaker. You will see from your current programme that we shall be showing a film about the Spoon-billed Sandpiper in May. Last year we sent a donation to help save this tiny rare wader.

In the days when the RSPB was an organisation devoted to the protection of birds, it had what I consider its most appropriate strapline "**Aren't Birds Brilliant**". For me that encapsulated all that most birdwatchers find fascinating about these creatures which are found in every corner of the earth and come in every shape, size and colour. Possibly only fish can compete in terms of variety but I confess to finding fish watching rather boring.

I was reminded of the old strapline last week when watching Chris Packham's programme about animal behaviour. He was testing the problem solving abilities of various creatures and while we all consider our dogs to be pretty smart, they came way behind the New Caledonian crows which managed to solve an eight stage puzzle to gain a food reward. When presented with a similar but much simpler problem Mr Packham's poodles just looked cute and endearing and waited for him to do it for them.

We'll have to rethink the insult "bird brain", it could turn out to be more of a compliment! Mind you, I think it will be a while before we see birds rounding up a flock of sheep or helping a blind person across the road.

**TUESDAY 11<sup>th</sup> MARCH**

**The RSPB's Natural Secrets**

Peter Holden reveals the wide range of birds, insects and animals found on RSPB reserves