

This is the last meeting before our summer break and after my nagging about needing articles for the newsletter I've now received two articles which I need to include in this issue as they both raise matters of great concern. Some of you may have heard or read about the first item which prompted John to put pen to paper.

CHRIS PACKHAM IN MALTA

I was listening to radio 4's Today programme on 22 April when John Humphries began a very disturbing interview with Chris Packham. I have tried to set out some of the main points that came across; I apologise if my transcript is not entirely accurate but the salient points are covered. John Humphries introduced Chris who said he was presently sitting on a Maltese hillside. John replies, "Lucky you".

Chris replied "You might think so but I'm sitting amongst the highest density of hunters in the world listening to gunfire not birdsong.

JH asked, "Are they shooting as we speak?"

"Yes, they've been shooting since first thing. The shooters are only 10m apart" (sounds of gunfire) He went on to explain that they were shooting Turtle Doves and Quail. (Turtle Doves have declined by 90% in the UK) He also found a Little Bittern and a Swift which had been shot. He saw a flock of Montagues Harriers coming in to roost as darkness fell. The hunters went out with torches and shot them on the ground. At one point a very emotional Chris said, "This is apocalypse".

JH then interviewed the member of the Maltese government responsible for wild bird regulations who gave a miserable and unconvincing response to questions stating that there were enforcement personnel active on the island. Chris came back on the attack by saying that enforcement personnel were not acting properly on the ground and cited an example when he had been escorted off public land packed with hunters. A policeman had been called who contacted the shooting organisation but he was told not to allow filming of their activities.

To hear this straight from the horse's mouth and from such a respected man as Chris Packham was truly shocking and highlights the need for action.

John Foley

I heard this item live myself, it really was disturbing and Mr Packham was very distressed by what he was witnessing. I suggest you find the item on Google, just type in "Malta massacre on migration" and plenty of information will appear.

Recycling

After recently making the effort to get a recycling scheme going for fundraising and several members bringing in items, I accumulated a black plastic bag of material. I rang HQ to arrange collection as had been offered. I was informed that the scheme had been dropped as they had lost their contact who did the recycling! I asked if this information had been circulated - of course not! I expressed my annoyance and asked if there was any joined-up thinking going on at HQ! Apologies were proffered and the promise made that all groups would be immediately informed, this hasn't happened as yet.

So, thanks to all who responded and of course apologies from me for wasting your time.

Bob

Roy Smith contacted me with the following article which is really as shocking as the previous article about Malta though not as high profile. Another example of the total inability of our European "friends" to appreciate environmental issues or to face up to influential lobby groups.

Vulture-killing drug licensed for use in Spain

In the March 2014 Birdguides newsletter it was reported that diclofenac has been licensed for veterinary use in Spain. This is the drug that was used for veterinary purposes in India where it killed 99% of their vultures within a couple of years. Spain is Europe's vulture stronghold, so the threat to these birds is very real. I have written to the EU Environmental Commission and they say that because it is against EU law to leave animal carcasses lying around for vultures to eat (which is what happened in India) there will be no problem in Europe. I remain sceptical of that. I have also written to the West Midlands MEPs who have been totally useless about this, either not replying or saying they can't do anything, it's up to the commission. That hasn't stopped 33 other MEPs who have tackled the commission on Malta's spring bird-hunting season, so ours could act if they wanted to.

Can I suggest that more letters to the West Midlands MEPs about diclofenac might shake them off their branches. You can get their email and addresses online. There is also an online petition at **change.org**. (You just search on 'vultures') I feel that if there is enough outcry about this huge risk to the European vulture population it may be that the drug is withdrawn for veterinary use.

Roy Smith

(I've just followed Roy's link and signed the online petition-every little helps, Bob)

CHANGES AHEAD

I have recently received a letter from the president of the St. Mary's charity, outlining and explaining some changes which are to be made in the near future. As an independent charity they do not receive any external/government funding to support running costs and in recent years haven't covered their annual expenditure. So, some changes are inevitable.

Four key areas are outlined in the letter but for now I think that two may directly affect us.

Introduction of evening opening for a range of events and activities to boost the overall use of the facility. This will apply to summer use only this year and may not directly affect us but could put pressure on the demand for use at other times.

Increase in hire charge; this will not affect us until 2015 but any increase in fee along with the inevitable increase in speakers' fees and expenses will reduce our ability to cover our monthly costs and to accumulate profit to feed back to HQ.

St Mary's has been an excellent meeting place for us over the years and many speakers have commented on what a pleasant and user-friendly room it is. We may have to consider some changes ourselves if we wish to continue to use this venue.

TWO NIGHTS FOR NIGHTJARS

It's that time of the year again when the mysterious churrers turn up on the Chase. Hopefully we'll get a couple of warm, still evenings when we shall be able to see as well as hear these eerie summer visitors. There's every chance of seeing Woodcock as well.

Meet at the Whitehouse car park at 9pm. June 10th and 17th