



## LICHFIELD RSPB JANUARY NEWSLETTER

Welcome to everyone at the start of the New Year. This is our 35th year as a local group and despite a few ups and downs over the years and coping with several changes of venue we seem to be doing OK, with an increase of membership in the area, a regular good attendance at indoor meetings and a greater involvement in other activities.

Julie has extracted the following details from the annual report.

### How We Measure Up - the Facts!

Lichfield & District is one of 175 RSPB Local Groups across the country. Every year we are asked by HQ to report on our activities for the previous twelve months, so, the committee meets, desperately racking brains to recall events, Bob licks his pencil and captures the information which is then forwarded to Sandy.

We've recently received the summary report and you may be interested to know that:

Local groups have

- \* Contributed £459,000 to the RSPB.
- \* Recruited over 370 new members.
- \* Circulated information to over 74,000 households.

So how did we do compared with other groups?

- \* We are 1 of only 29 groups nationally who circulate our information to all RSPB members in their area.
- \* We have twice the number of group newsletters a year.
- \* Our indoor meeting attendance is much higher than the average of 47.
- \* Only 2 other Midland groups (and 32 nationally) obtain sponsorship.

We also got a mention for taking part in ground clearance on Cannock Chase, erecting nestboxes for Lichfield District Council and leading Dawn Chorus walks.

We manage this with fewer than average regular volunteers, we know we could do more with your help!

One easy way to support the RSPB is through pin badge collection. Nationally 471 members are involved, raising a mammoth £142,813. We currently have only two regular collectors!

If you feel able to help in any way, please speak to any of the committee (identifiable by their badges)

Your help not only ensures the continuation of our group, but support for the RSPB and nature conservation. Are you willing to step up for nature?

## CHRISTMAS DOWN UNDER

It was exactly 12 months ago that we booked plane seats for our trip to Australia, apparently if bookings aren't made early it becomes impossible to get places in December as the world and his missis take to the air, homeward bound. Logically it wasn't the best time to fly, it's very busy, prices are higher and it's summer down there so temperatures are rising into the mid thirties. However we were committed to being in Perth for the Christmas and New Year for a family event so we decided to fly out at the beginning of December and see a bit more of the country.

We flew out via Singapore where we spent four days wearing out shoe leather trying to see as much as possible of this fascinating little country. Obviously in four days we only skimmed the surface and there were many items on our wish list that we didn't manage to fit in but we really enjoyed a day at the Botanical gardens where the sheer abundance and variety of tropical growth was a visual delight and a 5 foot Monitor Lizard ambling across the path in front of us had the camera shutters clicking madly.

As well as exploring the nearby Chinatown and Little India, a cheap and very efficient transport system encouraged us to travel further afield to Changi Chapel and Museum, a memorial to the notorious prisoner-of-war camp run by the Japanese during the second world war. Another bus journey north took us to McRitchie Reservoir where we escaped the noise and bustle of the city for a couple of hours walking and birding while pretending we were in a tropical wilderness though on a tarmac path with benches and a very welcome cafe at the end!

On to Melbourne where I felt our trip really began as we were now officially on the other side of the world, as far from home as it was possible to get and now I could begin to identify the birds we were seeing. As every species was new to us and despite pre-trip attempts at learning a few names I found the best technique was to take a quick photo and sort out id later. This worked very well and by the time came for the flight home I'd seen and identified 90 new species and made acquaintance with a few friends from home - Blackbirds, Starlings, Goldfinches, House Sparrows etc.

After picking up a hire car in Melbourne our next main destination was Adelaide via the Great Ocean Road which hugs the spectacular southern coast passing through little towns with lovely names such as Apollo Bay and Port Fairy. Australia is a huge country, 31 times the size of the UK and I really expected many seabirds and waders round the coastline but in all our travels the only coastal wader I saw was a pair of Sooty Oystercatchers south of Perth. There is also a surprising lack of gull species, with only three gulls being listed in the guidebook: Silver Gulls which are the equivalent of our Black-headed are everywhere but I only had a brief glimpse of a Kelp Gull and a couple of sightings of the massive-beaked Pacific Gull.

On arrival in Adelaide I met up with a school friend from 50 years ago! We'd attended Primary and Grammar School together then his family had taken the £10 assisted passage and we lost touch for many years. We made contact about three years ago through the magic of the internet and meeting up with him again was certainly one of the highlights of the holiday. It was with Dennis that my "life with birds" had begun as we cycled the lanes of North Worcestershire trying to identify species without binoculars and with the doubtful help of The Observers Book of Birds. He was still a birder engaged on conservation work on a local reserve where we spent a couple of hours wandering round talking over old times before enjoying a very welcome "barbie" at his house.

From Adelaide we flew to Perth to spend Christmas and New Year with family. By now I was becoming quite proficient at recognising the larger and more common birds though Australia has its fair share of "little brown jobs" which would undoubtedly cause problems no matter how much time I spent there.

Thinking back to all the new birds we saw, one bird in particular springs to mind as a real "stunner", the suitably named Splendid Fairy Wren. The size of a Goldcrest with the tail of a Long-tailed Tit clad in various shades of violet, blue and black this really was an unbelievably eye-catching little bird and fortunately not too shy so I was able to get a few decent pictures which hopefully I can share with you at a future date.

Bob