

WHAT THE EXPATS DID NEXT

Earlier this year we shared with you our birding experiences from our new country garden in Shropshire and said that, editor permitting, we would report on our survey work for the County Bird Atlas.

The aim of the atlas is to map the distribution of birds over a six year period, both in winter and the breeding season, to allow comparison with earlier surveys. As well as contributing to the BTO national bird atlas project, the results will also be used for a new comprehensive avifauna guide, *The Birds of Shropshire*.

At a South Shropshire RSPB Group meeting, a request was made for new volunteers to help with the final breeding season work, which concludes a five year programme. So we agreed to take part, together with Carol and Howard Perry, also escapees from Lichfield RSPB, who are now based in North Shropshire. We were asked to undertake two different survey methods - Roving Records and Timed Tetrad Visit - they both improved our birding skills and gave us valuable insights into the birds of our new "patches".

The fieldwork for both surveys was carried out in 2x2 kilometre squares on the Ordnance Survey national grid known as tetrads and using the BTO breeding birds codes which describe different bird behaviour indicating possible, probable or confirmed breeding. Rather than just seeing a bird and identifying it, the survey work required careful observation to assign the correct code.

Result of South Shropshire Breeding Birds Roving Records

Fieldwork for a previous atlas in 1992 set a target of 50 species for each tetrad, with evidence of probable or confirmed breeding for at least 30 of them and this was the target again for the latest survey. We were keen to focus on our local patch and as the tetrad in which our house sits hadn't previously reached the target, we were pleased to be able to concentrate on our garden and the surrounding countryside. This gave new interest to our local birding, trying to closely observe bird activity and behaviour and to accurately record the correct BTO code on the website.

By the end of the breeding season 53 species were recorded, with 41 probable or confirmed breeding - target exceeded! We were also delighted to record 5 species not previously noted including Red Kite and Spotted Flycatcher.

Julie and Peter Mitchell

Results of the North Shropshire survey to follow later.

NEW SPECIES OF OWL DISCOVERED IN OMAN

Just when we think we know everything, a new species of owl has been found in the remote mountain regions of Oman. It took the keen ear of Magnus Robb, a specialist in bird song and calls to pick out the unknown soft hooting of this owl while in Oman to record the scarce Pallid Scops Owl. Finding new birds is a very rare event these days, it is 77 years since a new bird was found in Arabia. Only six individuals have been located so far and by naming it the Oman Owl, it is hoped that it becomes a focus of national pride and is granted maximum protection.

TRIPS FOR 2014

At a recent committee meeting we discussed the subject of outdoor meetings. We have had two successful trips with Sutton RSPB Group and while we realise that neither trip could have occurred without joining forces there is still interest in trying to run our own trips. Sutton have offered 3 trips for next year but after long discussion we have decided to only join forces for one of them and to run two trips of our own. Heather has been busy researching coach companies and prices and has discovered that Greyshells Coachs have a 29-seater available. This could well be the answer to our problem but it does mean that we need a good response to fill the coach.

The present situation is that we shall join with Sutton for a trip to **Potteric Carr** in February; It is understandable that fewer members may be interested in a day out at that time of the year so a joint trip makes sense.

In May we shall run a **solo** trip to **Ynys Hir** on the Welsh coast. This is a RSPB reserve renowned for summer visitors; hopefully we shall be able to combine this with a stop at Bwlch Nant yr Arian another RSPB reserve a little way inland where there is a daily feeding of Red Kites.

Everyone who went to **Gibraltar Point** with Sutton really enjoyed that trip and although it is a longish journey, it will be worth it as it is a major migration hotspot. We shall repeat that trip in October as another **solo** trip .

There will be more information available later but you can sign up for any or all of these trips now.

FEBRUARY 16, POTTERIC CARR WITH SUTTON RSPB

MAY 18, YNYS HIR

OCTOBER 12, GIBRALTAR POINT

There is plenty of information about all of these sites online if you need more information now.

LET'S LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

I've recently made several long motorway trips and with the onset of autumn turning foliage into a wonderful range of reds, oranges and yellows, I became very aware of the vast number of trees that have been planted along these major high-ways.

There has been a considerable amount of angst expressed over recent years about hedgerow loss. While it is undeniably true that we have lost thousands of miles of hedges it has enabled farmers to use modern equipment, to maximise production and in doing so to produce crops at a price we prefer to pay.

The trend for ripping out hedges has been halted and now farmers get subsidies for planting hedges and stands of woodland. In the meantime let's look positively at motorways which enable us to get to our destinations far more quickly than in the past and which now are providing corridors of maturing native trees across the length and breadth of the country.

FUND-RAISING

As I've pointed out several times before in the newsletter, one of the functions of a local group is to raise money to feed back to HQ to continue the good work. A remarkable 91% of money raised is immediately put to use on conservation projects.

At the end of each financial year we send in any monies we have accumulated and which we consider surplus to our immediate needs. Last year we donated £1000.

In an attempt to fund-raise in a more pro-active way we are proposing to take a stall on Lichfield market sometime next year. If you are anything like me you will have accumulated a pile of old bird and other natural history books which you rarely consult. Do yourself a favour, make space on the bookshelf and donate them to be sold on the stall.

This is early information so that you can start to collect stuff together. Please don't bring anything in until asked!!