EAST DORSET LOCAL GROUP

NEWSLETTER N° 88 : SEPTEMBER 2011

The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing - help us keep it that way.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a Registered Charity, England and Wales Number 207276, Scotland SC037654
Dear Members

Welcome to another season. The summer has gone as quickly as ever.

A programme is enclosed with this newsletter. If you are new to birding, do come along to one of our field trips, as there are always plenty of experienced people to give you any help you may need.

The committee has put together another varied season of talks and field trips and I hope that you can enjoy at least some of them.

Jill Bale
Newsletter Editor/Programme Co-ordinator

GROUP LEADER’S MESSAGE

Dear Members

I hope you all had a good summer, despite the strange British Weather.

Way back in April I had the good fortune to go on the New Group Leaders Course at RSPB HQ Sandy, which I found very interesting. The salient points were:-

The RSPB is trying to get away from the perception of a birds only club and, as we all know from our walks and talks, it encompasses all of nature on its reserves and outlook.

In line with many other charities, there is no longer a set annual fee, eg you could pay a donation of £2 or £5 a month. 91% of all donations are used directly for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment.

Hugh Clark
Group Leader

GROUP NOTICES

Subscriptions. Subs are now due; the rate remains unchanged at £3 single, £5 joint. If you do not pay your sub by standing order, this may be paid to Lyn and Gerry Traves at any Group meeting or by post.

Group meetings. As stated in the May Newsletter, the Committee has decided reluctantly that the entrance fee for Group meetings must be increased, to £2.50 for Group members and £3.50 for those not members of the Group. This does include tea or coffee and biscuits.

CREAM TEA

Hugh and Jan put on an excellent afternoon, with cream teas and a superb raffle. The weather relented, the rain stopping at lunch time, and the sun shone in the afternoon. Thanks to Hugh and Jan for their hard work; they were ably assisted by friends and members of your Committee. Two quizzes were compiled and for those of you who were unable to attend these are reproduced
towards the end of the Newsletter. Hugh has told me that they raised a splendid £127 on the day.

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FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Linford Bottom was looking beautiful at the end of April. The two target species, Wood Warbler and Redstart, performed well and a Cuckoo also gave a flight view after singing tirelessly. The woodland flowers included Wood Sorrel and Wood Anemone, together with Bluebells. An unexpected bonus was a heathy pond, where we saw not only newts and tadpoles but also leeches. A few Large Red Damselflies and a Broad-bodied Chaser also put in appearances and beside the pond Heath Dog Violets were growing. All round it was a very satisfying morning.

The Fleet at the beginning of May produced a number of Little Terns, as well as the two commoner species. Two Knot in breeding plumage were enjoyed.

The visit to the Great Bustard Group in May was split into two, as only one Land Rover was operating. One Bustard was seen, a superb four-year-old male. One party saw a Grey Partridge and the other had five Corn Buntings sitting on fence posts. The Stone-curlews, which had two chicks, were very difficult to see. On our return to the visitor centre we were lucky to see a Hobby fly over; this made up for the missed Partridge for one of the groups. The day was finished in the local pub, the Swan, where we all enjoyed lunch. David felt that this was a very worthwhile trip and will try to arrange one next year for those unable to go this time.

The wind that spoiled so many birding trips in May persisted for our visit to Lydlinch Common at the end of the month. As the sky also remained leaden, we missed one of our two targets, Marsh Fritillary; possibly the summery weather in April meant that they had emerged early and were over. We did hear snatches of song from three Nightingales, but the weather kept them down. A variety of warblers was found, including both Whitethroats, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler, and Buzzards flew overhead. The morning ended on a brighter note, as the local church was holding its flower festival and most of us joined some of the ladies in the village hall for coffee and cake.

Whitesheet Plantation did not let us down at the beginning of June. The two main targets, Nightjar and Woodcock, performed well and we had a decent selection of other species, including Yellowhammers. A displaying Meadow Pipit and Stonechats were appreciated and a Cuckoo was singing.

The Isle of Wight trip at the beginning of July was attended by just eight members, who enjoyed a pleasant walk and saw a few birds. Perhaps the highlight was a small flock of Black-tailed Godwits returning for the winter. Many Common Terns were active in the
Solent and a few Gannets flew past Fawley Refinery. Marbled White was the commonest butterfly, but no White Admirals appeared in the woodland. Some lovely stands of Marsh Mallow made it an all-round good day. The weather had been reasonable when we set off and it was only when we were coming back into Yarmouth that the rain began.

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PROGRAMME FOR 2011/12
(All field trips by car)

2011

September
Sat 24 Field trip: Keyhaven

October
Thur 6 Field trip: Arne
Wed 12 Group meeting. Shaun Robson: “Birds of Poole Harbour”
Sat 29 Field trip: Portland

November
Thur 3 Field trip: Swineham
Wed 16 Group meeting. Martin Western: “Birds of East Africa”
Sat 26 Field trip: The Fleet

December
Thur 1 Field trip: Normandy Marsh/Blackwater Arboretum
Wed 7 AGM and American Supper. David Masser: “Farne Islands Birds”

2012

January
Thur 5 Field trip: Longham Lakes
Sat 28 Field trip: Blashford Lakes

February
Thur 2 Field trip: Portland Bill
Wed 8 Group meeting: Dominic Couzens: “Birds Across the Channel”
Sat 25 Field trip: Middlebere

March
Thur 1 Field trip: Durlston

N. R. GREEN

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Wed 14 Group meeting. Mike Read: “Aotearoa: The Land of the Long White Cloud”
Sat 31 Field trip: Radipole

April
Thur 5 Field trip: Shatterford
Wed 11 Group meeting. Terry Bond: “Autumn in the Scillies”
Sat 28 Field trip: Testwood Lakes

May
Thur 3 Field trip: Sherford Bridge
THE UNKNOWN LAND

Despite having travelled widely throughout the world, including all over northern and eastern Europe, I had never before visited France. This year that omission was remedied, as I made a trip to Corsica in May and another to Normandy in July.

The Corsican trip was inspired by a talk at the Group - you know who I mean! It had looked such a beautiful island in the pictures and I was not disappointed. Corsica is one of the most mountainous islands in the Mediterranean and when we visited in the first week of May the flowers were at their peak. We saw no fewer than 15 species of orchid, most of them new to me, and many other flowers, totalling some 250 species. Among the loveliest were Spring Sowbread, a dainty cyclamen, and Illyrian Sea Lily, a close relative of the late-flowering Sea Daffodil.

All three target birds performed; the Corsican Finches, a fairly recent split from Citril Finch, were the easiest to find and we had superb views of the exquisite little Corsican Nuthatch. A Marmora’s Warbler took some persuading to come out of the bushes, but eventually did so and was followed by a Dartford Warbler, familiar to us in Dorset but much rarer in Corsica.

Butterflies were a bit quiet, Orange-tip being perhaps the commonest, and the only disappointment of the week was that we did not find a Corsican Swallowtail. Our leader told us that he saw them only about once every three visits; also, the wind was strong in the areas where we might otherwise have found one.

Our hotel in the Restonica Valley was beautifully situated by a river where we found breeding Dippers and Grey Wagtails. A Blue Rock Thrush liked to sit at the top of a high peak and Crag Martins were active over the water. Lammergeier proved difficult to track down, but eventually we had reasonable views of this majestic vulture. While eating lunch one day we had good views of two superb male Mouflon and we were also witness to the unsuccessful attempts by strings of Pine Processionary Moths to cross the road, where they were squashed by passing vehicles.

Our second base was in the area of the large lake called Étang de Biguglia, where we saw Scops Owls in the hotel car park in the evenings, while during the day we feasted our eyes on such delights as Golden Orioles, Bee-eaters and several members of the heron family, among others.
One morning we were overlooking a promising looking field when the farmer drove up. Our leader opened the gate for him and later opened it again so that he could come out. So impressed was he with our good manners that he invited us to go into the field and look for birds! This yielded the bird that made our leader jump for joy; only once before, in twelve years leading tours on the island, had he seen a Collared Pratincole and that morning we all had views of this rare visitor to Corsica.

A long, winding road took us to the most northerly part of the island, Cap Corse, and we were all surprised to find that we were not on a headland overlooking the sea, with a lighthouse, but in a pleasant area of trees and shrubs where birds such as Turtle Doves and Pied Flycatchers and butterflies including a Cleopatra showed themselves. It was a truly memorable week.

At the beginning of July I made my first trip to mainland France, with a four-day visit to Normandy for butterflies. As I set out at five-thirty on the first morning, to walk from my home behind Poole Quay to the ferry terminal, the heavens opened and I was the archetypal drowned rat by the time I arrived. Our Fast Cat was subjected to very rough weather as we crossed the Channel and it took me the rest of the day to dry out, although fortunately I was not among the several passengers who were seasick.

Normandy, being in northern France, was predictably a complete contrast to the Mediterranean island of Corsica. The weather was not very kind, but despite that we managed to see 43 species of butterflies in four days, more than I see in a year at home. The one I wanted most to see was Large Chequered Skipper and we had superb views of this little beauty, with its dark underside, multi-ringed underside and bouncy flight. The rarest was Alcon Blue, which I had seen in Hungary, and among the other highlights were Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Mazarine Blue and Large Tortoiseshell.

In addition to butterflies, we saw a number of dragonflies and I had a new one for the list, the very well named Dainty Damselfly. On a damp heathland we found swathes of Summer Lady’s Tresses, a delicate orchid extinct in Britain and very rare in France.

Our hotel in Arromanches was on the shore, with views of the remains of the Mulberry harbour built during the Second World War, and everywhere we encountered moving reminders of the Normandy landings. We passed the landing beaches and noticed roads named after some of those who took part; I saw one called “Avenue le Dorset Régiment”.

We packed in plenty in those four short days, including a visit to the Bayeux Tapestry, for which there are no appropriate words. What a pity that I
did not realise that the personal commentary could be stopped, so that I passed along the 70 metre length of this world treasure too quickly. Bayeux also has a magnificent cathedral, just across the road from the museum where the Tapestry is displayed. On the way back to Cherbourg we also stopped at Ste Mère Église, where the monument is to the airman caught on the church by his parachute. I should like to return to Normandy at a future date to look at more of the War memorials.

Most people in the Normandy hotels spoke English, but it was good to be able to try out my somewhat rusty French in Corsica; people seemed to understand me! France will definitely be seeing me again.

Jill Bale

GOOD NEWS.
The highly controversial plan to build a road across part of the Serengeti has been dropped. This is one of the world’s most important migration routes and a road would have been an ecological disaster.

Cornish Choughs. The Cornish birds have had their best breeding season yet, with four nests producing at least 15 chicks.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper. A captive breeding programme has begun to try to save the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper from extinction. Eggs have been taken from the wild and moved to Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetland Trust to be reared.

New Buzzard species. A form of Buzzard, known but unnamed for 111 years, has now been declared a new species, Socotra Buzzard, and placed on the Endangered list.

And a new Vulture. Those members who have visited the Canary Islands will know that many birds there belong to distinctive sub-species, some of which are likely to be split as full species, as has already happened with the Tenerife Blue Tit. Another new sub-species has recently been announced, the Egyptian Vulture found on the islands being considered sufficiently different to be placed in a race of its own.

Mixed-up Petrels. Recently founded colonies of Herald, Trinidad and Kermadec Petrels have been discovered hybridising freely on Round Island off the coast of Mauritius. Experts have expressed their concern, underlining the danger of man-made habitat changes.

Help for Maltese Birds. The Oriental Turtle Dove that spent much of last winter in the garden of an RSPB member in Oxfordshire was seen by over 600 birders. Each person was asked to pay £5 for the privilege and over £3,000 was raised to help fight the illegal hunting of migrant birds in Malta.

Wind Turbines and Birds. Five Barnacle Geese were fitted with GPS tags to track migration routes, so as to assess the potential impact of wind farms off the coasts of Scotland and Norway. At least two large offshore wind farms are planned in the Firth of Forth and six along the Norwegian coast, the flight path of Barnacle Geese on their way to the Arctic breeding
grounds. It is hoped that the data collected will allow farms to be placed where there is the lowest risk of collisions.

**Mobile Kiwi.** Reports were received in the spring that a Kiwi had been found thousands of miles from its New Zealand home at Sochi on the Black Sea in Russia. According to the Russian media the bird was found in a garden. A local zoologist surmised that it might have arrived on a cruise ship, but since Kiwis are flightless and there is no known illegal trade in them because they are difficult to handle, the reported sighting remains a mystery.

**Long-line Fishing.** Despite international efforts, a new estimate is that more than 300,000 birds are still being killed each year. The birds are caught on hooks attached to the lines, some of which are more than 65 miles long, and are dragged under water and drowned. Near to home, the Spanish long-line fleet on the Grand Sol grounds off South-west Ireland is thought to be killing more than 50,000 birds each year, mainly Shearwaters and Fulmars.

Seabird deaths around South Georgia in the Southern Ocean have dropped 99% since the enforcement of regulations. South Africa has recorded an 85% drop and Brazil has recently passed a law requiring stringent measures for seabird bycatch in their domestic tuna-catch long-line fleets.

**Mixed Fortunes for Ospreys.** It is reported from Rutland Water that the male Osprey 08(97) has disappeared and it is thought that he was shot, as were two birds in that area last year. Better news comes from Wales, where a man-made nest saw the hatching of three chicks. The female was hatched at Rutland Water in 2008.

**Lost to the World?** It seems it really may be the end for the Eskimo Curlew, as there have been no confirmed records since 1983. Over the next five years the US Fish and Wildlife Service is to carry out a review of all recent reports of the bird, to decide whether it should be reclassified as extinct. The extinction of any bird is tragic, but it looks likely that a second curlew species, the Slender-billed Curlew, may be following its relative down the fatal path.

A final note of cheer. Not all the bird news is depressing. In south and west Scotland this year a huge explosion in the population of Field Voles has meant that Tawny and Short-eared Owls have had a very successful breeding season. Elsewhere, the Black Grouse population in Upper Teesdale has risen from 500 males in 2010 to 820 this year. The Yorkshire Dales population has also increased, from 90 to 130 males, although some of the males were moved into the area. In Northumberland, however, the population has crashed to just six males.

A-Z OF BIRDING: S (PART 3)

**Species.** A bird given its own status as differing from other birds; some species
have no sub-species and are described as monotypic, while others have two or, in some cases, many sub-species and are then described as polytypic. For example, the Yellow Wagtail is a species, *Motacilla flava*; it has a number of sub-species, some with their own individual names, such as Black-headed Wagtail, *Motacilla flava feldegg*.

**Spoonbill.** Dorset usually has a good sized wintering population of these relatives of the herons. They are most often seen at such places as Arne or Brownsea, usually with their distinctive bills tucked into their feathers. Several other species of Spoonbill are found in various parts of the world, including the spectacular Roseate Spoonbill of the southern United States.

**Squab.** The name for a young pigeon while still in the nest.

**Starling.** Throughout the world there are well over 110 species of Starling, many of them, like the Glossy Starlings of Africa, very brightly coloured. In Britain we have only the resident Common or Eurasian Starling, but the Rose-coloured or Rosy Starling is a reasonably frequent visitor. The other European species is Spotless Starling, which as yet has not been recorded in Britain.

**Stifftail.** A family of six quite small ducks, of which the only European species is the threatened White-headed Duck. Most birders in Britain are familiar with its American cousin the Ruddy Duck which, following an eradication programme, is now possibly extinct in this country.

**Stilt.** There are up to five species of Stilt in the world, depending on the authority consulted. The species that is found in Europe, and which has very occasionally bred in Britain, is the Black-winged Stilt, familiar to all birders who have crossed the Channel. These birds are closely related to the Avocet.

**Stint.** In autumn one of the small waders regularly found in Britain is the Little Stint, a tiny relative of the Dunlin. Much rarer is Temminck’s Stint, which has bred in this country once or twice.

**Stonechat.** A familiar member of the Thrush family, the Stonechat sits on top of bushes giving its “Whit-chat-chat” call. It is often said that on heathland a sighting of a Stonechat may be followed by one of a Dartford Warbler and this is indeed the case. This is probably not a “matey” thing; it is thought that one of the birds is relying on the other finding a tasty morsel and then dashing in to snap it up.

**Stork.** Very large wading birds that are found throughout the world. In Britain occasional sightings occur of the European species, White and Black Storks. In many European countries White Storks in particular are regarded as bringers of good luck and they suffer little persecution, their large nests being a welcome sight on buildings. In
Bulgaria and other countries people wear red-and-white wristbands called “Martenitsa” until they see the first stork of the year, when the band is hung on a tree branch.

Subspecies. Sometimes called “race”. See note on Species above.

Swallow. Throughout the world there are about 80 species of Swallow. One of the keenly anticipated signs of spring is the first Swallow returning from Africa, although the old saying, “One Swallow doth not a summer make” is all too true. Our own familiar species is now usually called Barn Swallow to differentiate it from other species, but the only other one likely to be seen in Britain is the Red-rumped Swallow, which breeds in Europe. The other members of the Swallow family that visit us in summer are the House Martin and Sand Martin.

Swan. There are seven species of swan in the world, three of which can be found in Britain. In this area the Mute Swan is the most familiar, but a few Bewick’s Swans grace fields in the adjacent county of Hampshire in the winter months. Whooper Swan occurs in large numbers farther north, but towards the end of 2010 a family of four turned up at Radipole Lake and two more were at French’s Farm, by Lychett Bay in Poole.

Swift. The Swift is a remarkable bird in that it spends almost its whole life on the wing. Although it looks similar to Swallows and Martins, it is not related to the hirundines and its relationship is thought to be nearer to Hummingbirds. A rare visitor to Britain is the larger Alpine Swift, which looks like a giant Sand Martin with its white underparts and brown throat band.

Sylvia. The generic scientific name for some Old World warblers. Those best known to local birders are the resident Dartford Warbler Sylvia undata and the summer visitors Whitethroat, S communis, Lesser Whitethroat S curruca, Blackcap, S atricapilla and Garden Warbler S borin. A fairly regular passage migrant is the Barred Warbler, S nisoria, but sometimes much excitement is caused by the arrival of one of the rarer species, such as the
Subalpine Warbler *S cantillans*, which sometimes drops in at Portland.

*Syrinx*. The bird’s voicebox, differing from that of human beings so that it can make more than one sound at once.

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**DORSET BIRDS: SUMMER AND EARLY AUTUMN**

A Black Stork seen earlier in the spring was still around at the beginning of May. During that month several Bee-eaters visited Portland and others were seen in the county. Two Night Herons were seen, while among the visitors to Portland were a Common Rosefinch and a Golden Oriole. A Savi’s Warbler sang for several weeks at Lodmoor. Brief visits were made to Stanpit by a Gull-billed Tern and to Radipole by a Black-winged Stilt.

At the beginning of August the Swifts began to leave for their winter quarters and a number of waders began to return. A Spotted Redshank appeared in Upton Country Park in mid-June in its superb summer plumage and most of the Black-tailed Godwits also came back in their finery. Keeping the Stilt-sandpiper company at Lodmoor were Green and Common Sandpipers, Black-tailed Godwits, Dunlin and Snipe.

“Swift”

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**JUST FOR FUN.**

Here are the quizzes that were used at Hugh and Jan’s cream tea. See how you can do against those who took part on that day.

1. **BIRD QUIZ**
   
   1. What name is given in North America to the birds known in Britain as waders?
   2. To which country is the Budgerigar native?
   3. Which bird is often called by its Shetland name Bonxie?
13. Which raptor gave its scientific name to a table-top game?
18. And which bird of prey is also the name of a traditional child’s toy?
19. Which bird is also known as Thick-knee?
20. Which summer visitor has the old name Deviling?

2. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE QUIZ

1. When told that the poor had no bread, Marie-Antoinette is alleged to have said, “Let them eat …” what?
2. Who was the third wife of Henry VIII?
3. How many players are there in a Rugby League team?
4. Which fashion house has the brand name Miu Miu?
5. What is the State capital of California?
6. Who wrote “Little Women”?
7. According to the proverb, Necessity is the mother of … What?
8. Which animal is the only known relative of the Giraffe?
9. Which actor played Rhett Butler in “Gone With The Wind”?
10. Which is the only horse to have won the Grand National three times?
11. What is the nickname of AFC Bournemouth?
12. Which instrument did Pablo Casals play?
13. With which sport do you associate Rosie Casals?
14. What was the maiden name of Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall?
15. What is the name of the pub in “Coronation Street”?
16. Which breed of dog is the favourite of HM The Queen?
17. “Conkers” are the fruit of which tree?
18. Which dictator was known as Il Duce?
19. Of which fish is Koi a species?
20. Who wrote the play “Blithe Spirit”?

(Answers in the January Newsletter)

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AND FINALLY…

How many of you noticed my “deliberate” mistake in the May Newsletter? Under the “News from Britain and Around the World” section there appeared a paragraph about the St Helena Plover. It was stated that Napoleon was imprisoned on St Helena before he went to Elba. *Mais non!* Of course he was sent to Elba first and after his escape from that island and defeat at Waterloo he ended his days on St Helena.
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