

JUST INCREDIBLE!

It's that exciting time of the year when we wait the arrival of the first spring migrants. In fact some have already put in an appearance, Chiffchaffs began filtering up the country a couple of weeks ago, Wheatears and Sand Martins have been seen and there have been sightings of Osprey over several of the local reservoirs. While our knowledge of migration patterns has vastly improved over the last few years and we no longer believe that swallows and martins spend the winter in the mud at the bottom of a lake there's still so much left to learn, so much to amaze us.

Check in any current bird id book and it will describe the appearance, behaviour and habits of that delightful little wader the Red-necked Phalarope. This is one of the oddities of the bird world with its role reversal parenting and 'spinning in the water' feeding technique. It is tiny, no bigger than a Starling and about half the weight! Even the latest reference book will describe how the Phalarope breeds in marshes in northern Europe then flies south to winter far from land in the Arabian Sea.

Now, advances in tracking technology have revealed the truth. In 2012, tiny trackers, weighing less than a paper clip were fitted to 10 Phalaropes from the Shetland breeding population. These devices recorded in detail the movements of the birds one of which was renetted last spring on return to its breeding site. Analysis of the recordings revealed that this delicate little wader hadn't flow a few thousand miles south-east to winter but had flown south-west, across the Atlantic, south down the coast of the USA, across the Caribbean and Mexico, finishing up off the coast of Peru! After wintering in the Pacific it took a similar route back to Fetlar in the Shetlands, an astonishing round trip of 25,000 km.

The Arctic Tern has always been credited with the longest migration journey, breeding in northern Europe towards the Arctic circle and wintering off South Africa in the Southern Ocean. However the tern is twice the length and twice the weight of the phalarope and looks built for speed and distance. The dainty little wader just seems too insubstantial for such epic journeys. I think the yellow jersey for endurance should now be awarded to the little fellow with the identity problem and doubtful table manners. (Info from British Birds April 2014)

Another date for the diary: on Sunday 27 April I'm leading a bird survey and identification walk in Beacon Park. Meet at the pavilion by the football fields for a 9am start. This is open to anyone who wishes to attend so come along to brush up your id skills or to lend another pair of eyes and ears so nothing is missed!
Bob

NEXT MEETING - and now for something completely different!

Our next meeting on the 13th of May will be the last one before the summer break and we're breaking new ground by presenting a film.

You may remember that we responded to an appeal and after a collection at an indoor meeting donated £50 to the fund to save this wader.



The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a member of the stint family, a very small wader (about 6 inches, bill to tail) that breeds in N.E. Russia and winters in S.E. Asia. It is remarkable for its spatulate-ended bill. Due to major loss of habitat and becoming the unintentional victim of netting, this wader is critically endangered, at one point its population was thought to number fewer than 200 pairs. A concentrated effort by WWT, RSPB, BTO, Birds Russia and Moscow Zoo is striving to save this species from extinction.

Our May programme film will show the challenges faced by a dedicated team determined to give this tiny wader a chance of survival.

SAVING THE SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER: May 13 at 7.30

Why not bring along a friend to enjoy the film.

MARKET STALL/BOOK SALE

Sometime last year I mentioned that we had decided to choose a Saturday in the summer and take a stall on Lichfield market. The main reason for the event is to advertise the presence of Lichfield RSPB Group, to chat to the general public, to answer their questions and hopefully to encourage them to attend our meetings. As yet we haven't set a date but if we are to sell off your surplus birding and wildlife books as suggested we need to collect them at the May meeting.

So, sort through all your books, pick out any you never use, pop them in a box and bring them along on May 13. Hopefully some will be sold which will raise money for the group, any unsold I suggest we donate to St Giles bookshop.

SWANLESS

I know it's not a proper word but as far as I know there have been no Whooper or Bewick swans recorded in our locality this winter. Normally at some point during the winter months a few yellow-billed swans turn up with the large herds of Mutes that graze the fields around Whitemoor Haye and are picked out by some eagle-eyed birder. Whoopers and Bewicks have made their normal migrations south to their UK wintering quarters being recorded and in many cases individually identified at Slimbridge and Martin Mere but the usual independently-minded characters who shun the soft life in a reserve just haven't arrived. I wonder why?