

WMBC NEWS

No 482 Autumn 2016



Scottish Crossbill - Speyside May 2016 - Photographer Rob Swift
This front page is sponsored by the Birder's Store, Worcester



WMBC News

Is published in March, June, September and December each year to link members with each other, what's been happening, current issues and forthcoming events on the birding scene in our area and further afield together with a selection of your articles and a comprehensive summary of the recorded bird sightings in our area

Well, you have truly surpassed yourselves for this issue, so my main task has been fitting in all your contributions and what a varied collection they are! I currently have one eye on the Rio olympics and you all deserve a gold medal. Well done and long may this continue. I look forward to receiving your copy for the winter issue shortly.

I hope you enjoy this issue of your Newsletter as much as I did when compiling it. Until next time have a brilliant bird filled autumn.

Sue

In this issue

Page 3	Membership Matters - John Hoyle
Page 3	2017 Cannock Chase Bird Survey Feedback - David Dodd
Page 3	Print v Digital feedback
Page 4	Joint WMBC/BTO Black Redstart Survey 2016 - Update - Jim Winsper
Page 4	Call for Volunteers - Possible Wild Bird Survey at Dudley Zoo
Pages 5-10	An Analysis of Staffordshire Bird Records 2005 – 2014 - Nick Pomiankowski
Pages 11-15	My Patch - Gailey Reservoirs - Belvide's Little Brother - Ian Moore & Steve Richards
Page 15	Change to our Permit System
Page 16	Twitch to the Western Isles - Gerald Brereton
Pages 17-21	Birdwatching in Goa, India - Brian Stretch
Page 22	Garden Birdwatching - Gareth Morris
Page 22	Belvide Team Work - Sue Judge
Pages 23-25	Club and Branch Indoor Meetings and Field Trips
Page 25	This month's Cartoon - John Crawford
Pages 26-29	Bird Notes - May to July - Humphrey Miller
Page 29	Our members are fascinating and Talented Folk - Sue Judge
Pages 30-31	WMBC Field Trip Reports - Ray Davies
Page 31	Print v Digital feedback
Pages 32-37	Birding trip to Speyside, Scotland April 2016 - Rob Swift
Page 37	Response to Unusual Bird Behaviour featured last issue - Jim Winsper
Page 38	Surprising Garden Bird - Yvonne Moore
Page 39	Officers of WMBC and their contact details

Stop Press: Some members, particularly those who visit infrequently, are having difficulty with the Belvide reserve entrance gate. The gate code on your membership card is correct and does work but as the gate drops slightly the bolt is sometimes reluctant to open and gives the impression that the code is wrong. If you have a problem pull the gate towards you to release the pressure and slightly lift the gate if necessary.

Sue



Membership Matters

We are pleased to welcome the following new members of the Club, who have joined since the last list was published. Please note the names shown are as on the membership forms but that all family members at each address are included in this welcome.

Mr I Court of RUGELEY, **Mr A Wilding** of STAFFORD, **Mr J Devaney** of LYMM, **Mr D Munn** of MARKET DRAYTON, **Mr T Hancock** of SUTTON COLDFIELD, **Mr A Brown** of BREWOOD, **Mr T Salmon** of BIRMINGHAM, **Mr G Burrows** of LICHFIELD, **Mr G Wykes** of COVENTRY, **Mr A Thompson** of OLDBURY, **Mrs M Foster** of BREWOOD.

We would be really pleased to see new members at any of the indoor or field meetings so please come along and introduce yourselves to Branch Officers. If you have a favourite reserve and wish to help in any way please contact the reserve warden

If you feel that you have been missed in the delivery of a newsletter, the 2013 Report or in fact any membership matter please do contact me giving full details, name, address and membership number. When you move or change email address please include the old address.

John Hoyle

Membership@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

If you wish to use email to contact one of our reserves the addresses are

Belvide@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Blithfield@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Harborne@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Ladywalk@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk



WMBC Cannock Chase Bird Survey 2017 David Dodd

The response of the membership to our request for help to survey Cannock Chase in 2017 has been stupendous. We have now sufficient volunteers to enable us to cover the survey area thoroughly. Roger Broadbent, Project Leader and Co-ordinator, and myself sincerely thank everyone who has made an offer of help. Anyone else who offers their assistance will be placed on a reserve list. We look forward to meeting you all in January 2017 to launch the field work.

I would just like to add that we would welcome casual observations from anyone bird watching on Cannock Chase next year, particularly during the period February to August. Such records should identify the area and species, for example, Penkridge Bank – Redstart.

David Dodd

Chair, Stafford Branch WMBC

Works at Gailey Reservoir

The proposed repair works at Gailey have now been postponed by the Canal and River Trust until 2017. Exact dates will be published on the Club website and in a future newsletter when available.



Joint West Midland Bird Club/BTO Regional Black Redstart Survey 2016

Jim Winsper



Since announcing this survey I have repeatedly mentioned the importance of good observer coverage throughout our region as being key to a successful project. Irrespective of our findings, adequate coverage will enable us to provide a realistic evaluation of the regions Black Redstart annual population. I am pleased to say that we appear to be achieving our aims in terms of coverage and the information that this is providing is being supplemented by the submitting of general records (outside of survey areas) by midland birders. Obviously there is a good awareness and interest in the survey and this is resulting in the overall collection of records; all in all it seems that a realistic picture is being painted. Currently, as I write this at the end of July, our information stands at 24 records/sightings that consist of 25 individuals (two birds at one location) in a variety of status categories except for confirmed breeding. It is likely and correct that breeding records may have been withheld from public information, we will learn more on this during the autumn period when breeding has ceased.

If we can maintain this effort in the second period of this year it will result in a very worthwhile project by providing up-to-date information. All Black Redstart records should be sent to the appropriate County Recorder or to BTO BirdTrack the online recording facility by visiting www.bto.org/BirdTrack and in all instances offering full details of the sighting and marked as confidential where breeding is concerned. For the survey, records should be sent to: -

website@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk and/or stevedaviesbtorep@hotmail.co.uk

For information concerning the survey, guidelines, survey methods and instructions, County Recorder e-mail contact and how you can become involved please visit: www.westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk and follow the link to the survey on the home page of ourwebsite.

Many thanks to all those who continue to search and to those who have submitted their records, please keep up the good work throughout the coming autumn and winter periods, the entire region will benefit from your efforts.

Jim Winsper

From our Secretary's Postbag

I am writing as I have recently been appointed the conservation officer for Dudley Zoological Gardens and am currently trying to promote the conservation of some of our native species that we have on site as well as in the local area. To do this I would like to work with local groups such as yourself to help promote the zoo to the local community.

What I wish to propose with your help is a survey of our site for what bird species we have here. We are also open to suggestions from yourselves as to how we can promote further bird life and even nesting birds onto our site. By doing this we hope also to promote yourselves and inform the general public of the important conservation work you do. Thank you very much and hope to hear from you soon.

When we received this mail Roger, our Deputy Chairman commented "This would be a lovely project for someone who lives close to the zoo. It has been sometime since I went there. I seem to remember a Rookery and Blackcaps singing as well as Green Woodpecker yaffling".

Interested? If so contact Mark at secretary@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk



An Analysis of Staffordshire Bird Records 2005 – 2014

Nick Pomiankowski

Introduction

In 2003 we started the computerisation of bird records for Staffordshire and since that time have placed all records going back to 2000 into the county database. Now that we have built up a considerable archive of bird records, I have been able to look at population trends and have produced a number of downloadable documents which can be found on the West Midland Bird Club web site under the 'Research' tab.

Whilst there is far too much information to publish in full in the Club Newsletter, I have shown below a few charts for to give a flavour of what is available on the web site. There are up to three charts per species, some omitted if of no particular relevance:

- Records by month to show monthly variations in number

- Records by year – to show annual trends such as increases or decreases in populations

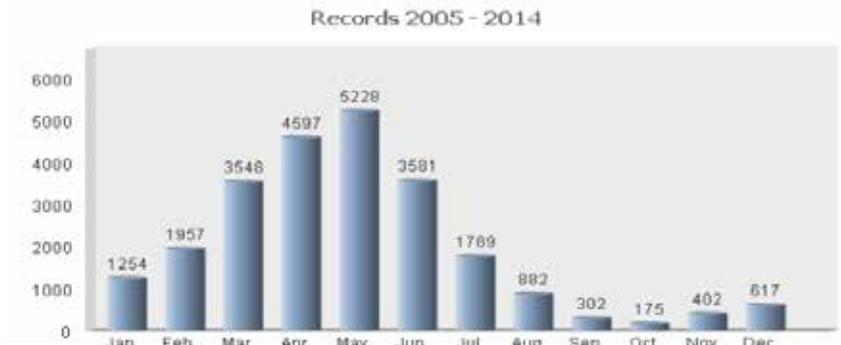
- Records day by day for a particular month – to show arrival times of migrant birds

The counts can include duplicates if a bird or groups of birds were seen at a site on several days, but duplicate counts for the same bird(s) at the same site on the same date have been excluded. So whilst the counts themselves will not match the number of birds in the county that month / year (this would be an impossible task!), the trends themselves are nevertheless indicative of population variations. I do hope the charts included here will be of interest to you and will encourage you to explore the web documents too.

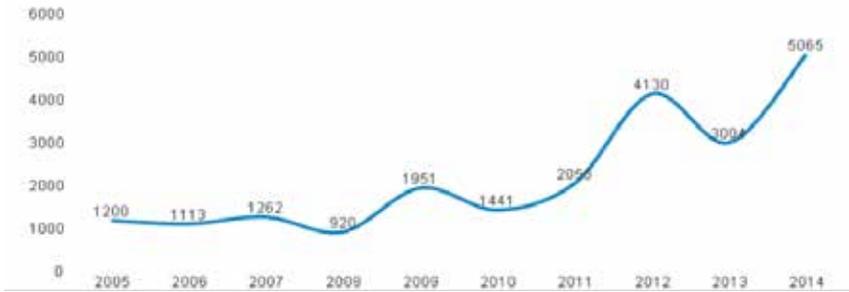
Shelduck

Shelduck numbers have increased considerably during the ten year period and with the highest monthly counts during the breeding period, this suggests the breeding population has also expanded.

National research has shown that most adult Shelducks move to coastal waters from July (the Heligoland Bight in Germany and Forth Estuary in Scotland being notable examples), to undertake their annual feather moult, leaving a few adults behind to tend creches of juveniles. This trend is matched in the monthly breakdown, where the autumn population is at its' lowest.



Records by Year



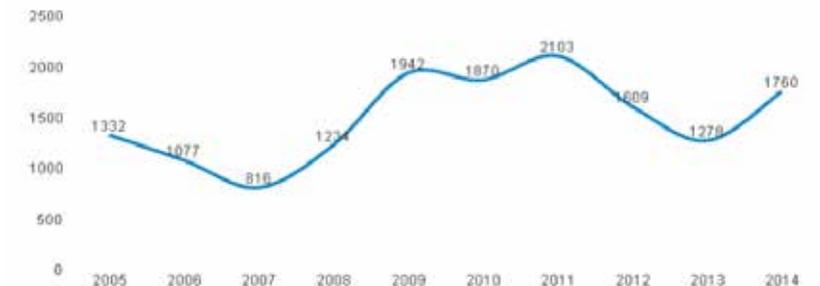
Little Ringed Plover

Little Ringed Plovers are a county breeding bird but are also migratory, arriving from mid-March onwards. The peaks in April and May show that many early visitors move on to breed elsewhere, however many stay and breed here hence good numbers in June. July counts increase as juveniles fledge and birds on return migration stop off at our reservoirs. Most birds have gone by September but a small number linger on into October and very occasionally November. Numbers by year fluctuate but overall appear to be steady.

Sighting Counts by Month 2005 - 2014



Sightings by Year



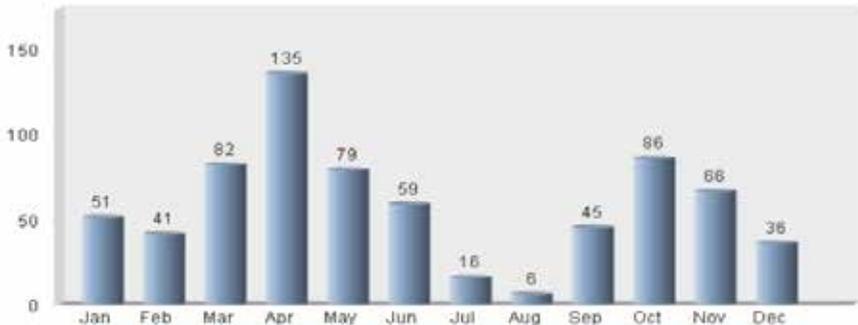
March Sightings 2005 - 2014



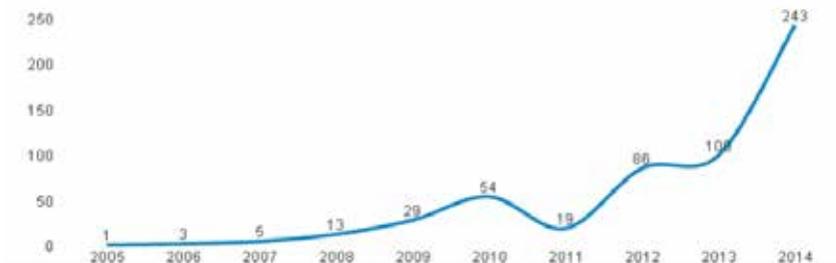
Cetti's Warbler

The most obvious trend over the ten year period is the transition from a county vagrant to a permanent resident and Cetti's Warbler is now part of our breeding fauna. The expansion from initial breeding sites on the south coast of England northward has been well documented over previous decades. Territories in Staffordshire have been noted at Middleton Lakes and Branston Gravel Pits, along with regular sightings at Aqualate, Belvide and Doxey Marshes, so it looks set to colonise the whole of the lower lying areas of the county over the next few years. The monthly breakdown shows the greatest number of records in April when it is most vocal prior to breeding and in the late autumn when they start vocalising again.

Sighting Counts by Month, 2005 - 2014

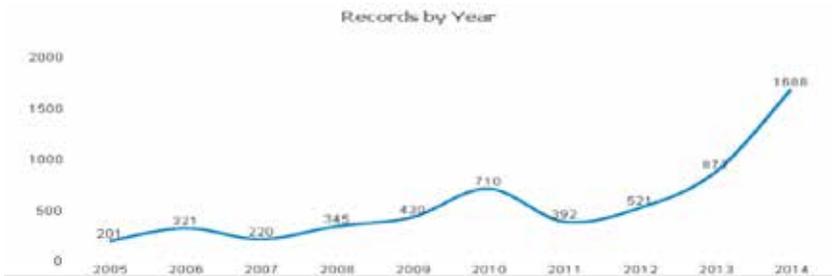
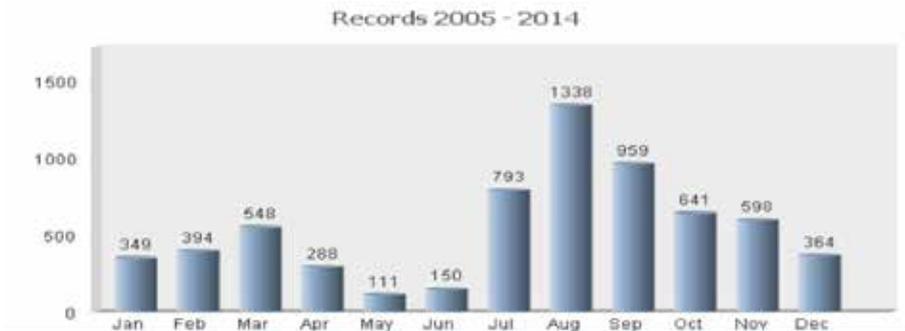


Sightings by Year



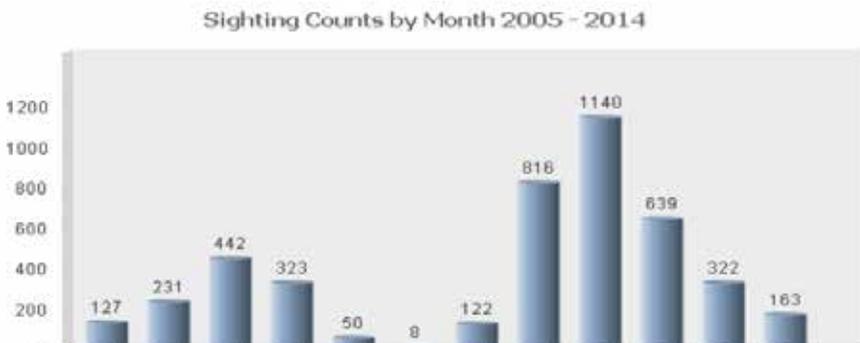
Little Egret

The annual chart shows the rapid rise in numbers in the county and it surely remains a matter of time before we have our first breeding birds. Peak numbers occur in the autumn

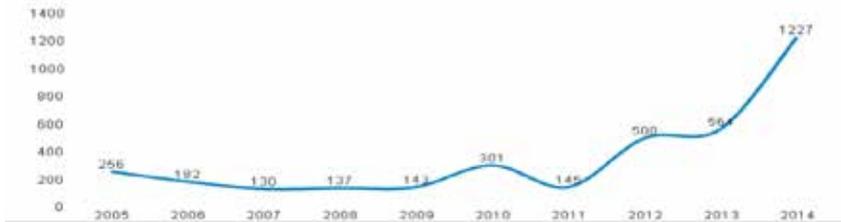


Ruff

Over the last three years, 2012-14, numbers of Ruff in the county have increased considerably. The reasons for this are unclear but are perhaps due to more suitable habitat being available. Whilst birds can be seen in any month of the year, they are mainly seen during autumn migration with smaller numbers on spring migration and even smaller numbers of wintering birds.



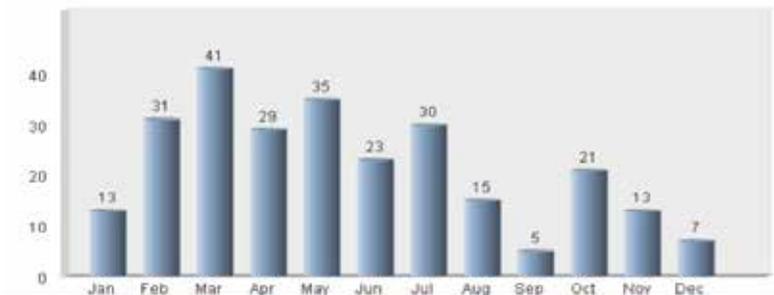
Sightings by Year



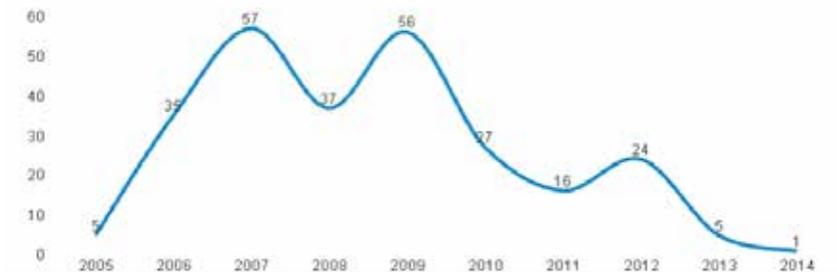
Dartford Warbler

The annual counts during 2005-14 document the arrival and ultimate loss of this species as a county breeding bird. First seen on Cannock Chase in 2004, the subsequent harsh winters of 2012 and 2013, particularly the snow cover in spring, spelt the end for this outlying population. Perhaps persistent egg theft had an impact on the population too. There have been no further sightings from 2015 onwards.

Sighting Counts by Month, 2005 - 2014

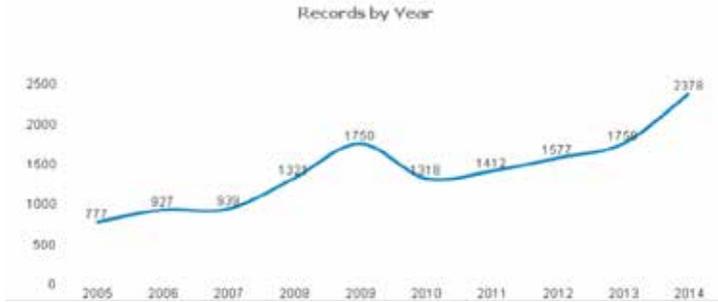


Sightings by Year



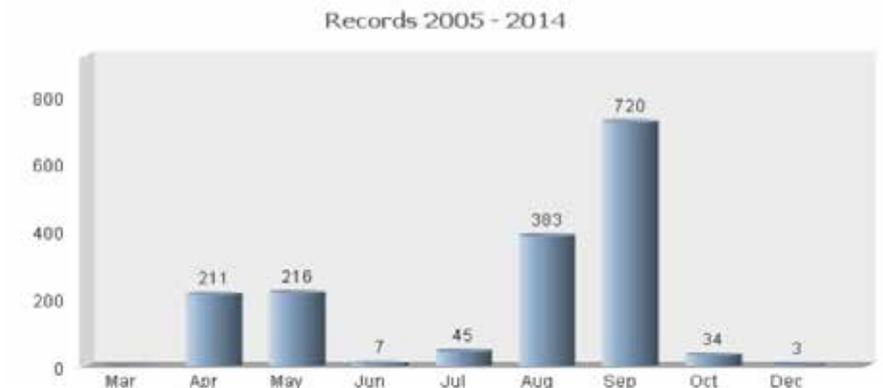
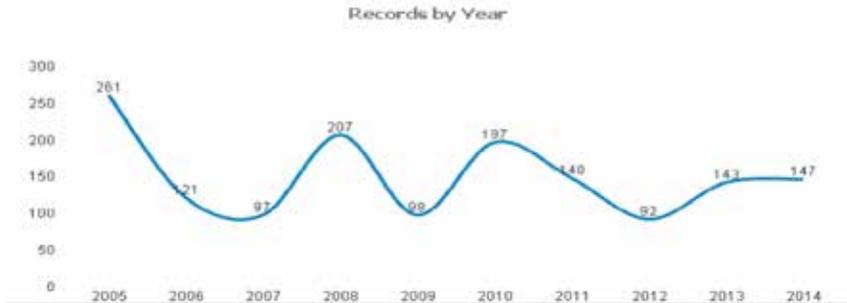
Stock Dove

Without the chart, it is unlikely that the steadily increasing numbers would have been noticed.



Whinchat

The annual counts vary quite widely from year to year and probably reflect the numbers of autumn passage birds passing through the county on their way south from their breeding grounds. As shown in the monthly counts, the best months to see this bird are August and September, along with a smaller spring passage in April and May. The December count is not an error; a bird blind in one eye did actually survive three days here one winter.



You will find the full versions of Nick's analysis papers on our club website under research. It is split into four papers, Waterfowl, Waders, Warblers and Other Species. You will also find other fascinating research in the same place.



My Patch

Gailey Reservoirs - Belvide's Little Brother

Ian Moore and Steve Richards

Access to Gailey Reservoirs is along Gailey Lea Lane, off the A5 Watling Street and just east of junction 12 of the M6 motorway. Entry is officially by permit only and is operated by the West Midland Bird Club. Sailing takes place on Gailey Lower Reservoir (The South Staffordshire Sailing Club - since June 1972) and Calf Heath Reservoir (Greensforge Sailing Club) with fishing activity now operating on all three reservoirs. The two small car parks off Gailey Lea Lane are private and for use by the sailing and fishing club members only. Visitors should park well off the lane as this is regularly used for access to and from Gailey Lea Farm by farm machinery and lorries.

Gailey Reservoirs are a pair of canal feeder reservoirs (grid reference SJ935103) and they were built in about 1847 – Gailey Lower Reservoir is to the west; Gailey Upper Reservoir to the east and they are separated by a causeway. The reservoirs originally fed the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, situated to the west beyond the M6 motorway. A connected reservoir, Calf Heath Reservoir, stands a little further to the west and beyond the motorway and this was constructed around 75 years earlier. The reservoirs have an estimated surface area of 337,000 square metres (83 acres).

How it all began... As a young birder living in Codsall, South Staffordshire my first proper 'patch' soon became Belvide Reservoir. I would cycle there several times a week as a schoolboy with Steve Nuttall and we soon built up quite a list of scarce birds and made many friends, especially John Higginson, who started taking us in his car to the other birding hotspots in Staffordshire. Visits to Gailey Reservoirs were very sporadic, and usually just to stop off when a good bird had been found there e.g. Smew in 1988, Red-throated Diver in September 1990 and Great Northern Diver in 1992. It was obvious that Gailey had potential, but also had a lot of disturbance, so the draw of the 'better' reservoirs of Belvide, Blithfield and Chasewater usually won.

In January 1993, I'd cycled from home to Cannock Tip to see an adult Glaucous Gull and when cycling back along the A5 to visit Belvide, I noticed Gailey Lower Reservoir was partially drained. A quick U-turn and I arrived at the sailing club to find a flock of around 150 Lapwing on the mud – a quick scan through and I was surprised to see a single Knot with them. Little did I realize how rare this was at the time as, 23 years on, there hasn't been another one there since! I visited again the next day to find the Knot had gone but had been replaced by a Redshank and five Shelduck – I was starting to realise this site could be decent! I visited again the next weekend and had two Ringed Plover and a Dunlin and this was only early February. Unfortunately the hope of a spring full of passage waders evaporated as the reservoir was full by early April, but by then I had also added up to six Little Ringed Plover and Common Sandpipers to my list of waders and started to build a small list for the site. The draw of the larger reservoirs largely took over again for the next couple of years but I did still drop in more often to my new 'second patch'. In late 1995 a visit produced a flock of around 300 Pochard on the Lower Reservoir and soon found 2 Greater Scaup and then in early January 1996 a female Long-tailed Duck stayed a day and 16 Bewick's Swan graced the adjacent fields – that was it, I'd found an under watched site with obvious potential, and I was going to give it a go as my new local patch to see what I could find. Little did I realise that, over 20 years on, it would still be causing me so much elation mixed with plenty of frustration – every inland patch birder knows what I mean and 'me and Gailey' have fallen out many times over the years, as my close birding friends (and now even social media!) know only too well but I still keep going back for more!

The patch now From around 2005, fellow Staffordshire birder and twitching companion, Steve Richards started to become a more regular visitor to the site and soon became the second birder to

call Gailey their 'patch'. In recent years, with increased work and family commitments and moving to the other side of the City of Wolverhampton from my patch, I don't get time to visit as often as before and Steve has taken on the mantle as the main Gailey patch worker. I do still get up there as often as possible – which is often a mad dash to 'twitch' one of Steve's finds! The patch rivalry is very much friendly and, as I'm writing this week, a drake Mandarin (the first since 1997!) has drawn Steve level with me on 172 species each for the site. From my research of all the literature of the WMBC, I've found records of 199 species for the site. Species 200 must be just around the corner with the likes of Little Tern, Sanderling, Cetti's Warbler and Caspian Gull the favourites to take this crown – although, knowing Gailey, it will be something totally unexpected!

Doing a patch year list at Gailey is a battle of serious willpower – the lack of wader habitat, and especially any hides to shelter in during the best (for birds!) weather conditions, makes the lure of other sites and their easier scarce birds a difficult temptation to resist. I did it once in 2006, after accepting the challenge from Steve Nuttall at Belvide, and racked up 128 species. This was subsequently equaled by Steve Richards in 2013 and then finally beaten in 2015 when, with some serious patch dedication and the bonus of a couple of months off work in the autumn, Steve recorded a mighty impressive 132 species!

Classic days are few and far between at Gailey – the worst weather often produces the best birds, so with the only current shelter being the overhang of the roof of the sailing club, this can prove difficult to endure. A weekend in September 2006 produced a Honey-buzzard, Osprey, over 20 passage Common Buzzard as well as Black and Arctic Terns and, maybe interestingly, two Ruddy Shelduck flying east. A classic weather day in August 2015 (with the right wind direction for shelter under the sailing club roof) saw the unprecedented passage (by Gailey standards!) of Bar-tailed Godwit, 4 Ringed Plover, Redshank, 4 Arctic and over 20 Common Tern.

Over the last two decades myself and Steve Richards (along with Richard Hollis who has a fantastic habit of popping in and finding the best birds!) have found some impressive inland birds at Gailey including; Franklin's Gull, Red-rumped Swallow, White-winged Black Tern, Ring-necked & Ferruginous Ducks, Sabine's Gull, Grey Phalarope, three Great White Egrets, two Honey-buzzards, Bearded Tit, Firecrest, Black Redstart, three Ring Ouzels and 17 Waxwings! Another of my personal highlights is that I have seen all five of the 'regular' British grebes in full summer plumage on the Lower Reservoir over the years as well as a summer plumaged Red-throated Diver!

The site is massively under watched, especially during the working week, as both myself and Steve work full-time and long hours in our respective jobs. So, if you want to make yourself a hero (or villain if we don't see it!) pop into Gailey rather than driving past and find your own good bird – it can be easily scanned from the north end of the causeway if you only have a short time with terns and rare wildfowl often picked up easily on the Lower Reservoir.

Key sites and species The current recording area, used since 1993 by the two regulars, covers the three main reservoirs and their adjacent fields and woodland, the fields adjacent to the bridleway between Gailey Lea Lane and Fullmoor Lane and the fields north of Gailey Lea Lane (but south of Micklewood Lane) as far west as the M6 motorway.

Lower Reservoir This reservoir is the largest of the two main reservoirs and the most popular with resident and wintering wildfowl, it is also the best place to connect with any passage wildfowl, terns, gulls and even the occasional wader or raptor. This reservoir is home to regular breeding Little and Great Crested Grebe, Tufted Duck, Mallard, Greylag and Canada Geese, Coot and Moorhen with Gadwall present all year round and they have bred. The island contains a popular heronry and occasionally breeding Oystercatcher. Cormorants can be seen perched on the booms around the island at any time of the year. In winter and on passage this reservoir holds reasonable number of

Tufted Duck with varying numbers of Goldeneye, Pochard, Shoveler, Teal and Wigeon – the numbers of all these species often differ considerably depending on the level of disturbance from sailing, fishing and especially shooting that unfortunately still occurs in the winter months. Goosander and Shelduck are irregular and Pintail is scarce. The most regular of the scarce passage birds on the water are Black-necked Grebe, Scaup and Common Scoter. The erosion protection booms around the island and the wall around the north side often hold Common Sandpiper in spring and autumn and have also pulled in the odd passage wader. In spring, and especially in the late summer, Common Tern can often be seen over the reservoir and perched on the many buoys or on the wooden boathouse and this reservoir is the most likely to attract one of the rarer terns or gulls. Black and Arctic Tern plus Little, Mediterranean and Yellow-legged Gulls are almost annual with Sandwich Tern and Kittiwake being recorded several times in recent years. Any passage waders (other than Common Sandpiper) are particularly noteworthy as the water levels are consistently high and any recent work that has resulted in the draining of this reservoir has unfortunately taken place in the winter to avoid any impact on the main summer sailing activities. This reservoir has held the majority of the rare birds found at Gailey since 2000 including Red-rumped Swallow (April 2004), Ring-necked Duck (October 2005), Ferruginous Duck (December 2005), Franklin's Gull (July 2010), Common Eider (January 2011) and White-winged Black Tern (September 2011).

Walking west from the sailing club along the north side of the reservoir the garden of Lea Cottage is a good place to look for warblers at the right time of year. This garden and it's surrounding hedges regularly hold all the common warblers with Spotted Flycatcher and Lesser Whitethroat often present in the late summer and early autumn after breeding nearby – this garden also hosted a singing male Firecrest in May 2013. The short grass field west of the garden, between the reservoir and Gailey Lea Lane, often holds a flock of Greylag and Canada Geese and these flocks have attracted both White-fronted and Egyptian Geese in recent years. The resident Oystercatchers can often be found resting up in this field and it has also attracted a Whimbrel. From the northwest corner of the reservoir there is a good view across to the west side of Fullmoor Wood and this can be a good place to look for raptors – Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel are resident with Peregrine, Hobby as well as Raven regularly seen from here, Red Kite and Marsh Harrier are becoming more regular and Hen Harrier and Goshawk have been recorded once each. The hedgerow on the western perimeter of this field, bordering the M6 motorway, has held Spotted Flycatchers and a Redstart.

The woodland below the dam on the west side of the reservoir holds all the regular woodland birds and the alders are the best area for Siskin in the winter. The wet area immediately behind the valve tower on the dam has held Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Woodcock, Tawny Owl and Marsh Tit. The pathway around the south side of the reservoir is now passable all year round, due to fishing activities, and this can often produce good views of the wildfowl. The large garden of the house at the south end of the causeway is worth checking for Spotted Flycatcher in spring and especially late July when the young have fledged and in the late autumn and winter for Brambling. The brick boathouse often holds Grey Wagtail.

A walk over the causeway is worthwhile as you get a good vantage point to view both the main reservoirs and, if it is not too disturbed by fishing, it can hold White and Yellow Wagtail in spring. Sedge and especially Reed Warblers regularly sing from the reeds and hawthorn shooting shelters and the causeway has briefly held the occasional passage wader and even a male Ring Ouzel.

Upper Reservoir This reservoir is slightly smaller than the Lower Reservoir and attracts a similar variety of birds, albeit usually in smaller numbers. The regular fishing activity and their boats often disturb the wildfowl from here although numbers can build up on this reservoir, especially when there is considerable sailing activity on the Lower Reservoir. Tufted Duck numbers are often higher on this reservoir, especially in the late summer and early autumn when a post-breeding moult flock can number over 200 birds. One of the small islands on this reservoir is the favoured drying spot for

Cormorant and this tree has also attracted both Great White and Little Egret, and in December 2012 it held both together! The most regular scarce passage birds on this reservoir are Scaup with the odd records of Black-necked Grebe and Common Scoter – although it shouldn't be overlooked as it has held Ferruginous Duck, Great Northern Diver, Garganey and Red-crested Pochard, all since 2005. The numerous wooden fishing platforms and the three islands often hold Common Sandpiper in spring and autumn as well as breeding Oystercatcher on the largest island. Common Tern can often be seen over this reservoir but the scarce terns and gulls are almost exclusive to the Lower Reservoir.

Walking east along the north side of the reservoir you get a good vantage point to scan the east side of Fullmoor Wood and the more distant woodland towards Cannock Chase and, as with the west side, raptors and Raven can be seen regularly given a bit of effort and especially luck. The wet woodland on the south side of the reservoir path can hold Water Rail, roosting Tawny Owl, Woodcock and is now the best chance of connecting with Marsh Tit. The thin strip of woodland, mainly beech trees, north of the path is the best spot to see Garden Warbler in the summer and Brambling in the late autumn and early winter. The reedbed on the north side of the reservoir holds a few pairs of Reed Warbler and a regular pair of Mute Swan. The walk along the south side of the reservoir allows a closer look at any wildfowl present but the noise from the A5 makes it difficult to hear any singing birds from the small pools that are just south of the road.

Calf Heath Reservoir The smallest and most disturbed of the three reservoirs it is rarely visited – usually just to get complete wildfowl counts for the area. The sailing club and large number of fishermen result in little being present on the water except for good numbers of Great Crested Grebe which also breed. The reservoir has held a flock of Common Scoter, a Scaup and a Black Tern as well as a fly over Gannet along the A5 in October 2003!

Gailey Lea Lane A walk or slow drive along the lane is worthwhile as the roadside hedgerow often contains a singing Lesser Whitethroat in the summer and has produced hunting Barn Owl during early morning or late evening visits as well as fly over Woodcock at dusk in the winter leaving their daytime roost in the Upper Reservoir wet woodland. This walk has produced a passage Merlin on more than one occasion. The field immediately north of the sailing club has also held a spring passage Bar-tailed Godwit and Whimbrel in recent years and the hedgerow just east of Gailey Lea Farm has held Whinchat more than once in the spring. The Red-rumped Swallow (April 2004) was also seen perched on the wires along the lane between the sailing club and the farm.

Bridleway from Gailey Lea Lane to Fullmoor Lane A walk along this bridleway is worthwhile given time and can add a selection of farmland birds that can't usually be found around the reservoirs. Starting at the gravel pull-in off Gailey Lea Lane, at the south end of the path, walk north along the west side of the hedge. This hedge can be productive for common migrants, especially in the autumn, and regularly holds all the common warblers as well as Lesser Whitethroat and Spotted Flycatcher and has attracted Ring Ouzel in both spring and autumn 2005, Redstart and Tree Pipit – gaining it the affectionate name of the 'Old Fall hedge' to the two Gailey 'regulars'. There are several gaps in the hedge and the field immediately to the east was traditionally the most productive field in the Gailey area, unfortunately it has now been largely lost to chicken farm sheds. It has attracted a variety of species during the year with winter often holding double figure counts of Common Snipe and Skylark and it was previously a semi-regular haunt for wintering Bewick's Swan and Grey Partridge but these have both become much rarer in recent years. In spring it can hold passage Wheatear and Meadow Pipits, Merlin has been recorded more than once, singing Skylarks are present in reasonable numbers and Barn Owl has also bred. In autumn the wild flowers are left and this is then the best area to find a passage Whinchat in September or a Stonechat in late October or November. The large field on the west side of the hedge is often ploughed and is traditionally the best place to see Wheatear on spring passage and flocks of Linnet, Golden Plover and Lapwing in the winter, although numbers

of the waders have reduced considerably in recent years. These fields occasionally attract a flock of gulls if they are ploughed in the late summer with Yellow-legged Gull noted on several occasions and the Franklin's Gull (July 2010) was originally located in the western field. A walk down the bridleway will arrive at the edge of Fullmoor Wood – a large wood used primarily for Pheasant shoots. The 'Pheasant cover' strips of set-a-side left on the edges of the fields near the western edge of the wood are usually good for finches and buntings and the best place to find flocks of Chaffinch along with a few Tree Sparrow, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting in the autumn and winter. The finch numbers have declined from past records but these can still attract the odd Brambling. A patch of blackthorn along the bridleway is a good spot for Lesser Whitethroat and Bullfinch. Fullmoor Wood is private and not accessible due to the shooting but in early summer roding Woodcock can be seen over the northwest edge from Fullmoor Lane. It is always worth keeping a look out above the wood for raptors and a burst of Woodpigeon out of the wood often results in the presence of a Peregrine.

This article has been added to our website for those wishing to visit Gailey and for your future reference. If anyone has photographs of the Gailey site or birds Jim would love to add them to the website also, please send them directly to him at website@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

A change to our permit system

At their meeting in March this year your Executive Committee made the decision to end the permit scheme for our Belvide and Ladywalk reserves, bringing them into line with our Blithfield reserve. Access to these two reserves will, from January 2017, be by Inclusive Membership of the West Midland Bird Club only. As permit holders do not receive this Newsletter they will be sent a letter explaining these changes during the next month or so. The main reason for this change is the confusion caused to potential members of our club when they read that access to our reserves is by 'permit only'. They seek and purchase a permit only to find that it does not give any of the add on benefits of membership of our club or access to our other reserves and indeed they are surprised to find that they are not, as permit holders, actually members of our club.

In an explanation of these changes let's look for a moment at what you get for your money. If you purchase a permit for £20 all you get is access to the reserve of your choice for **yourself and you alone**. Anyone else living at your address would have to purchase their own permit and this includes any children, if you have them, and if you wish to visit another reserve you would need to purchase another permit, or in the case of Blithfield Inclusive membership at an additional cost. Let's contrast this with Inclusive membership of our club which for £30 gives you, and those who live at the same address, access to **ALL** of the WMBC reserves. You also get a copy of the highly regarded WMBC annual report edited by Dave Emley, which covers all four of our counties; your quarterly copy of this Newsletter; a car sticker for parking at Blithfield and discounted access to Club evening meets.

It will be obvious from the above that our club, by posting out these add-ons, will actually make a financial loss by making these changes but one which we feel is well worth it to welcome the permit holders into the fold of our club and eliminate confusion to potential members in the future. If any permit holder wants clarification of this please contact belvide@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk and I will be happy to help.

A permit will continue to be available for our much smaller Harborne Reserve.

Perhaps this is a good time to point out that both Club membership and our permits run from 1st January until 31st December. This can cause confusion as the gate code doesn't change until 1st March but the two months is to give our Membership Secretary the time to complete the onerous task of turning around 1500 applications for renewal.

If you pay by standing order you don't need to take any further action and John will post your new membership card once your payment appears in our bank account. If you prefer to sent a cheque, the form you will need will be included in our next/winter Newsletter. Should you wish to change from cheque to standing order there will be an option for this on the form.

Sue

Twitch to the Western Isles

Gerald Brereton

When a Black-billed Cuckoo was found on the Western Isles Darren Barker and I went up to see it. For Daz it was a life tick but I had seen one before on the Isles of Scilly in 1990. We left Stoke on Trent on Tuesday 24th May 2016 at 21.55hrs and passed the 'Welcome to Scotland' sign at 0.05hrs on Wednesday and at 5.30hrs we arrived on Skye. As we made our way to the ferry at Uig we saw a White-tailed Eagle standing in a ditch by the road. We stopped to get some film of the Eagle but it flew off. We arrived on Uig to be told the Black-billed Cuckoo was still there. At 9.30hrs the ferry left for North Uist. On the way across we saw five Red-throated Divers, Great Skua, Puffins and Arctic Terns. At 11.30hrs we arrived at North Uist and by 12.00noon arrived at the Cuckoo site only to be told that the bird hadn't been seen since 7.00hrs however within minutes of being told this the Black-billed Cuckoo flew over us and perched on top of a bush and all 12 of us had really great views. It then went onto a gate before being flushed. The Cuckoo then flew down a field and sat on top of some rocks where I got to film the bird but only for a few minutes before it flew back up to the same garden where it went deep into a bush so we then went to look for Corncrake. As we drove around we came across a Short-eared Owl. I got some good film of the Owl flying over the moorland. We also saw a male Wheatear, the only one of the trip, and a group of six Rock Doves then we came across a birder taking photo's of a Corncrake in a field. We looked and saw a bird standing out in the open calling another bird which was heard but not seen, as it was in long grass. We then went back to the Black-billed Cuckoo site at Paible Junction only to find it perched on a wire fence out in the open, in full view, and only four of us watching it. Here I got some really good film of it, then it flew back into the garden and it went into a bush and sat in the sun. Now it was time to get some food and at the Westford Inn, after having something to eat and a pint, we went to find a place to sleep. We slept in the car and fell asleep to the sound of the sea and the Arctic terns. The next morning, after a really good sleep we were up at 4.45hrs. Our ferry was at 7.30hrs so we made our way to it. On the way we saw another Short-eared Owl. We got onto the ferry and went for some breakfast. The only bird of note seen from the ferry on the way back was a Manx Shearwater. We arrived back on Skye at 9.00hrs and then made our way home.

Gerald Brereton

Awaiting permission to use photograph

Birdwatching in Goa, India

by Brian Stretch

The Indian state of Goa is often considered an ideal destination as an introduction to Oriental birding. It is easily accessible from the UK, very safe and welcoming with, at least during the period November to March, a pleasant climate and most importantly the birding is superb. Andy Warr and I spent two weeks birding around North Goa earlier this year. We flew with Thomson's from Gatwick on one of their comfortable Boeing Dreamliner aircraft, the flight taking just under 10 hours. Even though it was dark when we arrived in the early hours of January 28th, birding started as soon as we stepped out of Dabolim Airport. House Crows could be heard calling in trees while we waited for our bus to the Marinha Dourada Hotel. Located at Arpora, this hotel has been a firm favourite with birders for the past two decades and although it is now in need of upgrading it does provide an ideal base. This is due to it being within easy walking distance of many key birding sites, including Arpora Woods, Baga Hill and Baga Fields while the hotel grounds and nearby pools can also be very productive.

It was dawn by the time we arrived at the hotel, and once checked in we were off birding. Concentrating our efforts around the hotel grounds and adjacent pools we were soon familiarising ourselves with some of the commoner birds of the area including White-browed Wagtail, White-throated and Stork-billed Kingfishers, Brahminy and Black Kites, Booted Eagle, Osprey, Shikra, Barn, Red-rumped and Wire-tailed Swallows, Scaly-breasted and White-rumped Munias, Ashy Drongo, Oriental Magpie Robin, Alexandrine, Plum-headed and Ring-necked Parakeets, Common Tailorbird, Asian Koel, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Blue-tailed and Green Bee-eaters, Jungle Myna, Asian Paradise and Asian Brown Flycatchers, Southern Coucal, White-cheeked Barbet, Long-tailed Shrike, Indian Yellow Tit, Greenish and Blyth's Reed Warblers, Rufous Treepie, Chestnut-tailed and Rose-coloured Starlings, Purple-rumped Sunbird, White-breasted Waterhen, Indian Pond and Striated Herons, Cattle, Great White, Intermediate and Little Egrets and Little Cormorant. Surprisingly, we also saw our only Pale-billed Flowerpecker of the trip.



Indian Pond Heron at Arpora - Picture: Brian Stretch

Our daily routine often started around dawn at 6am and continued through to late morning by which time birding became less productive as birds were more elusive during the heat of the day.

Occasionally we would plough on, especially when in more open areas or by water as there was always something to see. Late afternoon to dark at around 6pm was always a magical time as birds again became more conspicuous as they headed off to roost for the night.

Over the following two days we explored the aforementioned local hotspots of Baga Hill, Baga Fields and Arpora Woods. The former site brought us our first endemic of the trip, the stunning Vigor's Sunbird around the gardens along the route up the hill along with numerous Purple and Purple-rumped Sunbirds. Our first Indian Peafowl of the trip was also seen along the summit ridge, together with Indian Robin, Indian Golden Oriole, Rose-coloured Starling, Common Myna, Thick-billed and Nilgiri Flowerpeckers, Golden-fronted and Jerdon's Leafbirds, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, White-browed Bulbul, White-spotted Fantail, Spotted Dove, Small Minivet, Common Iora, Coppersmith Barbet, Little Swift and Oriental Honey Buzzard. Nearby, Baga Fields is an extensive area of damp grassland, cultivated fields and scrubby margins and provided our first views of Black Drongo, Indian Roller, Pied Bushchat, Brown Shrike, Siberian Stonechat, Malabar Lark, Paddyfield Pipit, Plain Prinia and Pintailed Snipe together with more familiar European species including Marsh Harrier, Hoopoe, Red-rumped Swallow, Tree Pipit, Bluethroat and Fan-tailed Warbler. Arpora Woods provided more arboreal species including Loten's Sunbird, Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike, Common Woodshrike, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater and Ashy Woodswallow, while the nearby pools offered a good selection of waders including Lesser Sand Plover, Red-wattled Lapwing, Pacific Golden Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper and Temminck's Stint.

The time had arrived for what we anticipated would be the highlight of the trip, five days in the mountains and jungles of the Western Ghats, staying at the famous Backwoods Camp. We were collected from the hotel at 4.30am and two hours later we arrived in birding paradise. As soon as we stepped off the mini-bus there were birds everywhere: Orange Minivet, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Blyth's Starling, Grey-breasted Prinia, Spangled Drongo, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Black-hooded Oriole, Crested Treeswift, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia, Brown-headed Barbet and the state bird of Goa, Flame-throated Bulbul. Once settled in to our chalets and fortified by a Backwoods breakfast we were taken on a guided walk around the camp by Leio, one of the camp's founding partners. Within minutes we were watching Greater Flameback, Orange-headed Thrush, Sri Lankan Frogmouth, Black-naped Oriole, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Crested Serpent Eagle, Indian Swiftlet and Malabar Parakeet. We also made our first visit to the wonderful Tamdi Surla Temple, set amongst pristine jungle habitat. Here we noted our first Malabar Whistling Thrush, Indian Blue Robin, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, Malabar Barbet and Mountain Imperial Pigeon while Black and Legge's Hawk Eagles were seen over a distant ridge. On our return to Backwoods Camp we were dropped off at the start of the entrance track to walk the remainder of the route and while doing so we saw three flyover Great Hornbills. The real purpose of the exercise though was to provide us with views of one of the 'stars of the show': Indian Pitta. After several minutes we were afforded good views as a single bird fed along the track.



Tamdi Surla Temple
Picture: Brian Stretch

The daily routine at Backwoods Camp is tea or coffee and biscuits at 6.30am then out birding until around 10am, back for breakfast then out again until lunch at around 1pm. The afternoon is then free to either bird the local area or rest before another trip late afternoon/early evening before dinner. We took several walks in the surrounding jungle and clearings which yielded Nilgiri Blackbird, Heart-spotted and White-bellied Woodpeckers, Black-rumped Flameback, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, Dark-fronted and Puff-throated Babblers, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Syke's and Western Crowned Warblers, Black-naped Monarch, Vernal Hanging Parrot, Grey-fronted Green Pigeon, Asian Fairy Bluebird and a superb male Malabar Trogon.



Malabar Trogon at Backwoods Camp. Picture: Brian Stretch

We also spent a morning at nearby Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary, which in common with Backwoods Camp, forms part of the wider protected area of Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary. This was to be the most productive area we visited with highlights including Crested Hawk Eagle, Little Spiderhunter, Tawny-bellied Babbler, Dusky Crag Martin, Verditer Flycatcher, Bronzed Drongo, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Brown-breasted Flycatcher, White-rumped Shama and the most colourful bird of the trip, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher. We returned to the camp where the good birding continued with Asian Palm Swift, Grey-headed Bulbul and Rufous-bellied Eagle being further additions to our burgeoning trip list.

Sadly, our time at Backwoods had come to an end but it had been a fabulous experience and we said our goodbyes to Leio and his team before returning to Arpora. We spent the remainder of the day in the grounds of the Bieria Mar Hotel at Baga, a well know haunt for visiting birders. The gardens overlook some superb marshland habitat and provide one of the best chances of seeing Cinnamon Bittern. An elusive bird was seen but not the hoped for Painted Snipe for which this marsh was once famed.

There are several local taxi drivers cum bird guides who, for a very modest fee, will show visiting birders some of the scarcer and harder to find species, saving a great deal of time and effort when the former is at a premium. Therefore we enlisted the services of one such guide, 'Rayman' who collected us from the hotel one afternoon and took us to see a White-eyed Buzzard and a Brown Fish Owl.

For larophiles, Morjim Beach is a must visit location with the familiar Black-headed Gull found alongside both Slender-billed and Brown-headed Gulls. Larger species were represented by Steppe, Heuglin's and the mighty Great Black-headed Gull, many of which were in their stunning breeding plumage. However during our visit many of the gulls were roosting on distant sandbanks in the Chapora River mouth so we hastily chartered a boat to enable us to obtain closer views. We also noted small numbers of Gull-billed, Greater and Lesser Crested Terns and a single Western Reef Egret. Back on the beach we had great views of Kentish Plover alongside Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers while just behind the beach is a network of sand dunes and beach huts. This is a regular wintering site for Bay-backed Shrike which we saw well along with Barred Buttonquail, Brahminy Starling and a totally unexpected flyover Black-naped Oriole.



Bay-backed Shrike at Morjim. Picture: Brian Stretch

We also visited nearby Siolim Marsh, a vast wetland teeming with birds, many viewable at close range from the causeway that dissects the area. Our target bird here was the increasingly scarce River Tern and we were fortunate to see two birds along with Painted and Woolly-necked Storks, Black-headed and Glossy Ibises, Pied Kingfisher and Pheasant-tailed Jacana amongst large numbers of wetland species. Later that day we returned to the hotel to find two Indian Scops Owls were again roosting in a clump of bamboo near the kitchens, providing incredibly close views.

Following another visit to Baga Hill we were walking back to our hotel when I decided to take a look over the wall of an overgrown garden. Remarkably, the first bird I saw was an Indian Pitta just 20 feet away, sat motionless in a shaded hollow where it remained long enough for Andy to obtain the image below.



Indian Pitta: Picture Andy Warr

Carambolim is another vast, bird rich area, comprising a large lake, extensive marshes, paddy fields and woodland. Good numbers of Indian Spot-billed Duck, Ruddy Shelduck, Purple Swamphen, Indian and Little Cormorants were noted along with a wide selection of waders, ibises, herons, egrets and storks, while a single Indian Spotted Eagle and Citrine Wagtail were seen. The woodland area apparently has roosting Brown Hawk Owl and in common with many birders we failed to locate any although we did see several Indian Peafowl and a Greater Spotted Eagle..

Another early start saw us at Dona Paula, located just south of the state capital, Panjim. This is a recognised site for Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark and although we drew a blank with this species, we obtained stunning views of a pair of Yellow-wattled Lapwing while two Oriental Skylarks and several Indian Robins were also seen. Nearby Santa Cruz marsh is a truly amazing wetland with large numbers of cormorants, herons, egrets, storks, wildfowl and waders present and here we recorded new birds for the trip including Lesser Adjutant, Watercock, Paddyfield Warbler and a rare visitor to Goa, White-tailed Plover.

A return trip to Bondla, around a one and a half hour drive from the coast, again lived up to expectations with fantastic views of Forest Wagtail, White-rumped Shama and a pair of Malabar Trogons in the same view as an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (!) while three new prized species were also found: a pair of Blue-bearded Bee-eaters, Indian Grey Hornbill and Besra.

When in Goa a boat trip along the River Zuari is a must. Specially organised 'kingfisher cruises' depart on specific dates, bookable through Backwoods Camp and our trip had been arranged for our last day in Goa. We met up with Leio for the 8am departure and were soon on our way to search for our two target kingfishers, Black-capped and Collared. These were duly seen along with Stork-billed, White-throated and Common Kingfishers while bonus birds included Slaty-breasted Rail, Indian Great Reed Warbler and the beautifully plumaged Orange-breasted Green Pigeon. On our return from the cruise we stopped off at Batim Lake where a wide range of waterfowl were present including huge numbers of Lesser Whistling Ducks and forty or so Garganey. Later in the day we visited Mayem Lake with 'Rayman' where we saw our final new species of the trip, Jungle Nightjar; two birds were roosting in trees near the edge of the lake. A Crested Hawk Eagle, Little Spiderhunter and several Orange-breasted Green Pigeons were also noted here before it was time to head to the airport for our flight back to London.

In two weeks we had clocked up 250 species, some familiar, many unfamiliar. We could have spent whole days at many of the key sites we visited, rather than just an hour or two and there were many sites we simply didn't have time to explore. For any birder contemplating a trip to Goa for the first time I can't recommend it highly enough. It is home to an amazing array of birds and other wildlife, set amongst fabulous scenery with friendly people and is a great cultural experience in its own right. In fact we enjoyed it so much we are now planning a return visit in January 2017.

This article can also be viewed online with additional photographs, video clips and a complete trip list at: www.birders-store.co.uk/blog/birdwatching_goa_india.html

For details about Backwoods Camp and the Kingfisher river cruise visit: www.backwoodsgoa.com

The Oriental Bird Club is a UK registered charity for birders and ornithologists around the world who are interested in birds of the Oriental region and their conservation. For further details visit: www.orientalbirdclub.org

Brian Stretch

For anyone who might not be aware who or what a Larophile is, it is one who arguably spends too much of his or her time sifting through flocks of gulls enjoying the challenge of identifying, aging and just studying them.

Sue

Garden Birdwatching - Gareth Morris

I live in Slitting Mill on the eastern edge of the Chase so one might call this cheating! Some four or five years ago I became aware of the large number of bird species that were visiting the garden. A rough count confirmed this, in fact around forty different species were noted. I decided to put these random observations on to a more formal standing by adding them to the BTO's Garden Birdwatch scheme. Before too long the list was approaching the fifty mark with some fairly unusual birds for gardens. Whilst species such as Great Spotted Woodpecker were daily visitors, especially when peanuts were on the menu we also got Raven, Redpoll, Mallard, Siskin, Tree Creeper and Goldcrest. A buzzard was also spotted consuming what looked like a grass snake high up in the oak tree. Probably the most unusual bird coming to the feeders was a Common Crossbill. This chap visited some two or three times a day for about a fortnight last summer. At the time it seemed relatively tame which allowed for some record shots of the bird.

With a number of feeders attracting large numbers of small birds I suppose it was inevitable that a Sparrowhawk might put in the odd appearance. However when this individual decided to visit one of the feeding stations I thought it gave a whole new meaning to the term 'Bird Table'

By the end of last summer the total had reached 58 and I was struggling to add many more. It therefore came as a surprise a few weeks ago that I heard what I thought was a Blackcap in the holly tree. Not that unusual since a pair had successfully nested here last year. On closer observation however this Blackcap morphed into a Garden Warbler, number 59... but they don't visit gardens, do they? Will I ever get to 60 and will it be the elusive House Sparrow?



Gareth Morris

Belvide Team Work

The 2014 capital works projects at Belvide are proving to be a real success and the team should now give themselves a hearty pat on the back! Everyone has played their part from Rob Swift who produced the original plans and got approval for them from Natural England, Sue Miller who took on the arduous task of seeing these projects through to completion, whilst Rob recuperated from surgery, Nigel Talbot who project managed all the work parties to tweak the areas under development and perhaps most of all the Belvide work party stalwarts for their unstinting efforts in carrying out his plans. The reward for everyone concerned has been close up views of a wide range of waders and other birds dropping in to rest and refuel and with water levels going down nicely, in time for the autumn migration, thanks to our friends at CRT, who knows what might be in store? Check out Steve's Nuttall's Belvide Birding Blog for all the latest news and photographs or simply come along and see for yourself.

Sue



Club and Branch

Indoor Meetings and Field Trips

Please note: All WMBC members and their families are welcome to join all WMBC field trips and attend any Branch indoor meetings or field trips.

WMBC Field Trips

The Eagle eyed amongst you will notice immediately that in another great step forward for our Club there is now, thanks to your Executive Committee and organiser Ray, a fixed price rather than a range for each trip so you know exactly what you are committing yourself to, when you book.

Coaches depart from Cambridge Street, Birmingham City Centre, promptly at the time stated. Food and drink should be brought as required. Appropriate clothing and footwear to guard against the elements is recommended.

Please Note: A deposit of £20 per person for the April, Devon weekend is required by 11th September and payment in full for the Norfolk weekend is required by the end of September.

Contact: To book or for further information please contact either:

Ray Davies 0121 682 4375 or 07762 061603
wmbcfieldtrips.ray@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Judith Gerrard 0121 427 3779 or 07975631430
wmbcfieldtrips.judith@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Please Note: the coach can become fully booked (48 is possible) but non arrivals on the day can prevent those on a waiting list the chance to enjoy the day. Could members please contact Ray or Judith, however late, if they have to cancel their booking. On Sunday morning ring Ray's mobile: 07762 061603 with any delays or late cancellations, Thank you.

Sunday 11th September 2016

Titchwell RSPB

Depart: 07:00hrs Expected return: 19:30hrs

Cost: £21

Seek seabirds, waders, wildfowl and migrants at a peak migration time at this prime RSPB reserve.

Another opportunity also to see how effective recent major changes and improvements (made to combat the effects of predicted higher sea levels, and to upgrade viewing facilities) have been.

Sunday 9th October 2016

Spurn Head

Depart: 07:00hrs Expected return: 19:00hrs

Cost: £20

Jutting out into the North Sea a peninsula that attracts passage migrants and vagrants. Expect anything!

Friday 4th November 2016

Norfolk Weekend

Cost is £69.00 per person per night. Full payment of £138.00 for the 2 nights will be required to confirm a booking. Cheques to be made payable to West Midland Bird Club (WMBC) and sent to Ray Davies at 140 Bradbury Road, Solihull, West Midlands, B92 8AL, **to be received no later than 31st September.** This is the latest date for bookings to be taken. These conditions are necessary to meet the terms and conditions of the hotel and assist our administration of the cost.

Sunday 4th December 2016

Newport Wetlands, RSPB, South Wales

Depart: 07:00hrs Expected return: 19.00hrs

Cost: min £16

The Goldcliff pools offer waders and wildfowl. After at the Wetlands more waders on the estuary and around the lagoons seek Cetti's Warblers and Bearded Tits in reedbeds, hope for Bittern. With any luck finish the day with the spectacle of a Starling murmuration!

Sunday 8th January 2017

Rutland Water

Depart: 07:00hrs Expected return: 18:30hrs

Cost: £20 which includes reserve entrance fee Prime inland reservoir with lagoons, marshy margins, fields and woodland to provide a wide range of species to start the year.

Sunday 12th February 2017

Potteric Carr

Depart: 8:00hrs Expected return: 19:00hrs

Cost: £16

A return visit to this prime reserve that has been significantly extended. It offers a mix of woodland, pools, reedbed and scrub with a wide range of woodland birds, wildfowl and waders and always the possibility of bittern. If a member of a Wildlife Trust (not Norfolk) bring your card, otherwise additional cost of £4, or £3 concessions.

Sunday 12th March 2017

Forest of Dean

Depart: 07:00hrs Expected return: 19:00hrs

Cost: £16

The regular visit to this Gloucestershire site at the time of peak activity offering prospect of displaying Goshawk, finding Hawfinch, Dipper and Crossbill, admiring spectacular Mandarin and what chance of Great Grey Shrike again?

Friday 7th April 2017

Devon Weekend

We return to the Langstone Cliff Hotel at Dawlish Warren for our annual Devon adventure. The cost is £72.00 per person per night for half board for those sharing a room and £85 for singles. A deposit of £20 per person by end of September is required by the hotel to confirm our booking. Please provide this payment by 11th September by cheque made out to West Midland Bird Club (WMBC) and sent to Ray Davies at '140 Bradbury Road, Solihull, West Midlands, B92 8AL' to confirm your booking. We settle the remainder of our own bills at the Hotel on departure.

Travel by own transport to meet at 6.30pm for dinner at 7.00pm. Centred at Dawlish Warren we will search for local specialities and lingering wintering species, as well as the first summer migrants and rarities that may be present.

Further WMBC field trips, 2017 for your diaries - more details next issue.

April 30th Fowlmere/Paxton Pits

May 21st Ynys Hir

June 25th Frampton Marsh

September 16th Minsmere

October 8th Gibraltar Point

November 10–12th Norfolk Weekend

December 3rd Wicken Fen

SOLIHULL BRANCH

Branch contact on 0121 705 8507

Email: solihull@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Indoor meetings

Indoor meetings are held in the Guild House, Knowle B93 0LN, commencing at 19:30hrs
Admission: WMBC members £2.00, non-members £2.50.

Please note: Access from the eastern car park via the churchyard is unlit and those who are not confident about their night vision should either bring a torch or take the slightly longer route via the High Street.

Details of the programme for the remainder of 2016 are as follows:

Friday 7th October 2016

Gerry Griffiths - Ohio – Magee Marsh

This area, on the southern shore of Lake Erie, is a prime stopover for migrating birds in the spring.

Friday 4th November 2016

Ian Butler - 'Sun, Sea and Sandpipers'

Ian shows us what can be seen in the Farne Islands, the Camargue, the Red Sea and Borneo. This talk has kindly been sponsored by Roger Skan Esq,

Friday 2nd December 2016

Phil Mugridge - 'Islands of Britain'

A welcome return by Phil to tell us about wildlife on our islands. This talk has kindly been sponsored by BVP Management Company Limited

Field Meetings

Sunday 18th September

Blithfield (SK055236)

Meet at 10.00hrs at the car park on the causeway. Don't forget to display your Blithfield Sticker. Autumn migration will still be in progress when we visit one of our principal reserves.

Leader: Roger Broadbent.

Roger, as well as having been elected Deputy

Chairman at the Club's A.G.M. last month, has for a long time been the leader of our Blithfield Birders' Group. We shall benefit greatly from his extensive knowledge of the reserve.

KIDDERMINSTER BRANCH

Contacts 01562 824615 (Branch Chair, Brian Rickett, 1 Russell Road Kidderminster) or 01384 839838

Indoor Meetings

Meetings are held at St. Oswald's Church Centre, off Broadwaters Drive, Kidderminster DY10 2RY commencing at 19.30hrs. A charge of £2.00 per person for WMBC members and £2.50 for non-members is made, which includes refreshments. The meetings recommence after the summer break as follows

Wednesday 28th September 2016

Jim Almond

Memorable Birding Moments.

Jim has gathered together his truly exciting days of Birding and Photography.

Wednesday 26th October 2016

Keith Orford - Chasing the Day

Some of the remarkable journeys and intriguing behaviour in birds is triggered by Light from the Dawn Chorus in springtime onwards.

Wednesday 23rd November 2016

Colin McShane - Birds of Belvide

A study of the many birds who visit the WMBC Reserve at this premium site in Staffordshire.

Wednesday 7th December 2016

Ashley Grove – Lammergeiers of the Spanish Pyrenees

Exciting times with this awesome bird. Christmas Buffet to follow the talk.

STAFFORD BRANCH

Branch Contact: 01543 490096

Email: stafford@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Indoor Meetings

These are held at the Perkins Sports & Social Club, Tixall Road, Stafford. ST16 3UB. Drive past 'Reception' and follow the road to the wooden

building on your left. Park on the Club site. Meet at 19:30hrs for a sharp 19:45 start.

Tuesday 1st November 2016

Jeff Clarke - Stand up for Nature

Jeff's personal view of conservation laced with his usual sense of humour.

Tuesday 6th December 2016

Speaker to be confirmed. Please check out the Club's website nearer the date.

Field Meetings

While the Stafford Branch has no formal field trips arranged at present for 2016/17 the Committee is aware that there are new members who consider themselves as beginners or novices and who would like the opportunity to go birding with more experienced bird watchers. This also applies to more experienced bird watchers who may wish to come along as well to share the social chat and, maybe, excitement. Some members have made contact and we are trying to enhance their birding experience. If you would like to join in please let us know.



Cartoon from Club member John Crawford



BIRD NOTES

May to July

Compiled from your records by Humphrey Miller

These notes are, for the greater part, compiled from unchecked records posted on blogs and via Twitter accounts. My thanks to all who submitted records. This period covers the breeding season, also containing the last of the spring migrants and the first returning migrants of the autumn.

RARITIES

First, a late item from autumn 2015: a record of a **Spotted Sandpiper** at Draycote Water on 8th October, not publicised at the time, has been accepted by British Birds Rarities Committee. Pick of the waders for the current period was a **Broad-billed Sandpiper** which visited Brandon Marsh briefly on 2nd June. Two **White-winged Black Terns** were at Draycote Water from 9th-11th May, and a **Roseate Tern** was reported from Belvide on 11th May. Reports of **Glossy Ibis** came from Ladywalk, Middleton Lakes/Whitemoor Haye and Lower Moor. A **Great Skua** at Westport Lake on 15th-16th June had to be taken into care, but is reported to have recovered. . A **Long-tailed Duck** was at Alvecote Pools from 16th-18th June. **White Stork** reports have come from Sandwell Valley and Wyre Piddle/Throckmorton.

BLACK REDSTART SURVEY

New records for the period are covered by Jim Winsper's report on page 4.

W.M.B.C. RESERVES

BELVIDE

23rd June was not just the date of the E.U. referendum; it also marked the reserve's first successful breeding of **Black-headed Gulls**, with two more pairs breeding subsequently. The count of 34 **Sanderlings** on 18th May was a reserve record, and other notable wader counts were 46 **Black-tailed Godwits** and 13 **Common Greenshanks**. **Temminck's** and **Little Stint**, **Turnstone**, **Whimbrel**, **Avocet** and **Wood Sandpiper** were among the other wader species recorded. A **Spotted Flycatcher** nest was, unfortunately, predated: other passerines included a juvenile **Pied Flycatcher**, **Yellowhammer**

(bred successfully), **Corn Bunting**, **Wood Warbler**, **Yellow Wagtail**, **Grasshopper Warbler** and **Whinchat**. Five **Little Terns** were recorded on 10th May, the highest count of **Black Terns** was 22, **Common Terns** bred, and there were a few visits by small numbers of **Arctic Terns** (highest count 10). A **Little Gull** was recorded on 8th June, and there were a few reports of **Mediterranean Gull**. Raptors recorded included **Osprey** and **Marsh Harrier**. A flock of over 5000 **Common Swifts** was seen on 25th May. A **Garganey** visited from 5th-12th May.

BLITHFIELD

A **Great White Egret** visited on 29th July. 27 **Common Scoters** (all male) were recorded on 26th-27th June. There were a few sightings of **Osprey**, and other raptors reported include **Red Kite**, **Common Kestrel**, **Hobby** and **Peregrine Falcon**. 40 juvenile **Yellow Wagtails** passed through on 29th July, nine **Common Crossbills** went over on 29th June, and other passerines included **Tree Sparrow** (10 on 2nd July), **Whinchat**, **Common Redstart** and **Northern Wheatear**. Two **Little Terns** were recorded on 9th May, and the highest count of both **Arctic** and **Black Terns** was nine. Wader species included **Black-tailed Godwit** (highest count 16), **Little Ringed Plover** (bred), **Oystercatcher** (bred), **Sanderling** and **Whimbrel**. Two **Little Egrets** were recorded on 3rd and 8th July. A **Mediterranean Gull** was present on 14th and 15th July.

HARBORNE

Common Kestrel, a rare visitor to the reserve in recent years, was seen on three occasions on 1st June. A **Garden Warbler** sang in May, but did not stay, and a male **Common Whitethroat** arrived on the late date of 8th June and sang for a couple of days. The first **Common Swifts** were recorded on 8th May. A **Rose-ringed Parakeet** was seen on 7th July. **Grey Wagtails** carrying food were recorded on a few occasions in July, but these normally breed off the site. **Stock Dove** has bred, with three birds regularly near an obvious nest hole. **Green Woodpecker** was very vocal in late July, having

been silent since mid-May. **Song Thrush**, **Blackcap** and **Common Chiffchaff** were still singing well into July. Juveniles have been seen of **Song Thrush**, **Blackbird**, **Robin**, **Bullfinch** and **Goldfinch** have been seen. **Common Buzzard**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Eurasian Nuthatch** and **Eurasian Jay** were recorded throughout the period.

LADYWALK

Goosanders bred, and nine out of ten young were reported as still alive when last reported on 3rd July. **Shoveler** and **Gadwall** (three broods) also both bred, and there were a few reports of a **Garganey**. Three juvenile **Little Egrets** with two adults on 20th July presumably came from Middleton Lakes (see below). Juveniles trapped by ringers up to 3rd July included **Stock Dove**, **Common Kingfisher**, **Cetti's Warbler** and **Reed Warbler**. Wader reports included one or two sightings of **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Ruff**, **Whimbrel**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Oystercatcher** and **Common Snipe**, with more frequent records of **Little Ringed Plover** (including juveniles), **Ringed Plover**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Common Sandpiper** and **Common Redshank**. Up to five **Common Cuckoos** were recorded. Raptors included **Marsh Harrier**, **Red Kite** and several sightings of **Hobby**. A **Barn Owl** was recorded on 7th May. Passerines included **Pied** and **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Yellow Wagtail** and **Grasshopper Warbler**.

SELECTED RECORDS FROM OTHER MAIN SITES

TAME VALLEY

(N.B. all records are from Middleton Lakes unless otherwise stated)

The principal event was the region's first breeding record of **Little Egret** in the heronry at Middleton Hall, with three young being raised. A **Eurasian Bittern** was recorded on several dates: it was once heard to boom. A **Great White Egret** was seen on six dates, with one sighting over the M42 at Kingsbury and another at Borrowpit Lake, Tamworth. **Avocets** bred for the second year, with four young. A **Curlew Sandpiper** was recorded on 29th July. A **Wood Sandpiper** was reported from Kingsbury Water Park on 8th July, and there was a later record from Middleton Lakes on 30th July. Other wader species included **Whimbrel**, **Ruff**, **Common Greenshank**, **Red Knot**, **Grey Plover**, **Turnstone** and **Sanderling**. **Shoveler** bred, and

there were several reports of **Garganey** in both spring and autumn. There were single reports of **Marsh Harrier**, **Osprey** and **Red Kite**, and several of **Hobby**. A **Short-eared Owl** was recorded on 28th May, and there were several reports of **Barn Owl**. A **Black-necked Grebe** visited on 5th May. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was recorded on 5th July. There was a count of at least 10 **Cetti's Warblers** and five **Grasshopper Warblers** on 7th May. **Whinchat** records included one on the unusual date of 17th July. There were two records of **Pied Flycatcher** in early May. A **Spotted Flycatcher** was recorded on 18th May. There have been a few reports of 1-2 **Yellow Wagtails**. A **Yellow-legged Gull** visited Bodymoor Heath Water for the eighth consecutive year. Up to four **Mediterranean Gulls** were recorded. 15 **Arctic Terns** were reported on 10th May.

MARSH LANE

A **Great White Egret** was reported on 25th July. Three unseasonal juvenile **Whooper Swans** were recorded on 1st and 11th May. A **Short-eared Owl** visited on 14th May, and there were several sightings of **Barn Owl**. A flock of 30 **Black Terns** visited briefly on 8th May. There were a few sightings of **Red Kite** and several of **Hobby**. A **Garganey** was recorded on one date in May and two in July. There were several reports of **Common Cuckoo**. A **Grasshopper Warbler** visited from 4th-7th June. A **Whimbrel** was recorded on 10th July. There were several records of **Mediterranean Gull** with a highest count of four

PRINCIPAL RECORDS ELSEWHERE

NON-PASSERINES

Records of single **Northern Pintail** came from Brake Mill Pool (Hagley) and Kemerton Lake. A **Greater Scaup** was at Earlswood Lakes on 5th July. A **redhead Smew** was an astonishing May record at Salford Priors. There was just one report of **Red Grouse** from the North Staffordshire Moorlands. There was a record of two **Grey Partridges** at Whittington (Kinver) on 20th May. Reports of **Common Quail** came from Berryhill Fields and Ipstones Edge. A **Northern Gannet** flew over Wolverhampton on 5th May. A **Great White Egret** was recorded at Branston on 29th and 31st July. **Black-necked Grebes** were reported from Branston, Upton Warren, Aqualate and Earlswood

Lakes. **Marsh Harriers** were reported from seven additional sites. A **Hen Harrier** was recorded at Silverdale on 5th May. There was a report in the birding press of a **Northern Goshawk** at Sandwell Valley in May. A photograph appears on the Morton Bagot blog of a **Common Buzzard** carrying a predated **Carriion Crow**. Other reports of **Osprey** came from five locations. A **Merlin** was reported from Silverdale on 31st May.

The number of young produced in the **Avocet** colony at Upton Warren is reported as 25. Further records of **Grey Plover** were from Ripple, Upton Warren, Draycote Water, Braunston and Grimley. A **Red Knot** was recorded at Brandon Marsh on 10th and 11th May. A **Temminck's Stint** was at Tucklesholme from 18th to 22nd May, and there was also a one-day record from Brandon Marsh. A **Little Stint** was recorded at Uttoxeter Quarry on 10th May. A **Bar-tailed Godwit** visited Clifton Pits from 6th-11th May, and Tittesworth had a one-day record on 20th. **Wood Sandpipers** were reported from five further sites. Additional reports of **Turnstone** came from Salford Priors, Brandon Marsh, Draycote Water and Grimley.

A **Little Gull** was seen at Westport Lake on 12th May. Further reports of **Little Tern** came from Draycote Water, Clifton Pits, Westwood Park and Codsall Wood. The highest count of **Black Terns** was 50 at Brandon Marsh on 10th May. A **Sandwich Tern** was recorded at Draycote Water on 28th June. There was a count of 70 **Arctic Terns** at Chasewater on 10th May, with 69 at Uttoxeter Quarry (same birds?) on the same day. **Turtle Doves** have been reported from Hollybed Common and Stoulton, in addition to the bird in the featured article on page 38. **Barn Owls** have been reported from Morton Bagot, Brandon Marsh and i54, and in south Warwickshire it has been reported that there have been plenty of breeding pairs, but productivity is low. **Short-eared Owls** have additionally been reported from Salford Priors and Berryhill Fields. A **Hoopoe** was reported from Newcastle-under-Lyme on 4th May. A **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was seen in the Wyre Forest on 5th June.

PASSERINES

Records of **Willow Tit** include a family party at Chasewater and a first site record for Endon

sewage treatment works. **Marsh Tits** have been reported from the New Fallings Coppice section of Clowes Wood. Reports of **Cetti's Warbler** away from the regularly reported locations come from Hatherton Reservoir, Draycote Water, Alrewas Arboretum, Trent Washlands, near Horninglow Marina and Clay Mills (these last three sites are down-river from the regularly reported site of Branston). **Wood Warbler** sightings come from Highgate Common, Gailey Reservoir, Kinver Edge, the Wyre Forest, Grimley, Downs Banks and Knypersley Reservoir. **Grasshopper Warblers** have been recorded at 13 further sites. **Dippers** have been reported from Trentham Gardens, the North Staffordshire Moorlands and the Wyre Forest. There were a few reports of **Ring Ouzel** from Walton Hill at the beginning of the period. An unseasonal **Fieldfare** was at Swallow Moss on 9th May.

Additional records of **Spotted Flycatcher** include a count of 11 at Hanchurch Woods. On 6th June three pairs of **Common Redstart** were seen feeding young at Tittesworth. Further records of **Whinchat** include a family party of four birds at Longdon Marsh on 14th July. On 3rd May a party of 14 **Northern Wheatears** at Berryhill Fields contained two *Greenland-race* birds. **Pied Flycatcher** records include a count of 11 at RSPB Coombes Valley. On 26th July there was a count of 50 **Tree Sparrows** at the regular site of Whitemoor Haye. **Tree Pipits** have been recorded at seven sites. 15 **Common Crossbills** were counted near the trig point on Cannock Chase on 19th May. Two **Hawfinches** were reported from Grafton Wood on 16th July. Four **Corn Buntings** were recorded in the Elford/Whittington area, with singles at Wishaw, Whittington (Kinver) and Wasperton.

Humphrey Miller

Bird Notes - Any bird notes for inclusion in the next newsletter should be sent to Humphrey Miller, 29 Dorchester Court, Dorchester Road, Solihull, West Midlands, B91 1LL by 1st November, 2016 please.

Please Note: references to any location in this newsletter are no guarantee of right of entry. The appropriate permit should be obtained or permission sought from the landowner or such authority as necessary for the privilege of birdwatching on the land in question.



Our Members are Fascinating and Talented Folk

When I joined the WMBC Norfolk weekend last November I had two things in mind. The first was a good birding weekend in a prime location with excellent company. I wasn't disappointed - highly recommended. Secondly, as a fairly new Editor of this Newsletter, I wanted to spread my wings (note birding reference) and meet lots of club members who could, hopefully, contribute to future issues.

Trip organiser, Ray Davies, took me under his wing (birding again) and paired me up with Tracey Gough and brothers John and Paul Crawford who proved to be the most marvelous company and patiently ensured I got wonderful views particularly as dusk fell on the Sunday when their expertise put us in the right place for great views of a male Hen Harrier, Marsh Harriers coming in to roost and two hunting Barn Owls. Note to self: don't forget to send Ray your cheque for this year's trip.

At some time during the weekend someone asked me if I was aware that John was a talented cartoonist, just the sort of information I was seeking. John generously agreed to me using his cartoons, the latest of which is on page 25 of this issue. Since then he has sent me a link to his blog which not only includes birding trips but his many other interests which begs the question how does he fit it all in? but the latest post revealed his brother Paul to be equally talented as it announced the publication of their first joint book for children written by Paul and illustrated by John.

This book is a complete joy. The illustrations are, as one would expect from John, delightful and the narrative is witty and fun and has a message. If you are a parent or grandparent of young children trust me Father Christmas would be very clever if he included this in someone's stocking this year, my grandchildren love it. For more details check out Johns blog at jacey666.wordpress.com



If you know a member with hidden talents let me know for a future feature.

Sue



West Midland Bird Club

Field Trip Reports - Ray Davies

Ynys-Hir RSPB Nature Reserve - Sunday 15 May 2016

Departure at 07.00 took us by a slightly different route to the Centre at Ynys Hir. Beside the entrance Siskin were soon found on the birdfeeders. Near the rear of the Centre a Wood Warbler was heard in treetops and proved the usual 'neckbreaker' as the group strained to see it. Pied Flycatchers also foraged in treetops. Redstart was nesting again in a favourite spot and gave excellent views of this attractive species. Tree Pipit was found in the trees on the edge of the grassy area. Along the track out to the reserve edge a Spotted Flycatcher was in the area of the railway bridge. Looking over the river from the reserve boundary telescopes revealed an Osprey at its nest, in the nearby reserve. It soon left to see off a Hen harrier as it flew over! Reed and Sedge warbler were around pool areas and Cetti's called. Whitethroat, Garden Warbler and Blackcap were in areas of undergrowth. Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler were heard regularly. Finch species including Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch and Redpoll helped to swell the total of species recorded to 68. A very productive day.

Fowlmere RSPB / Paxton Pits - Sunday 19 Jun 2016

After a 07.00 departure we arrived at Fowlmere at 10.00. After a short introduction from the Reserve Manager we set off onto the reserve. From Brewer hide a Moorhen crossed the channel, Reed Warblers called and hunting Marsh Harriers flew over. Common birds were recorded as we walked beside the chalk stream seeing the occasional trout. As we turned out of the wooded area into the open a Hobby perched on the side of a hawthorn bush. The excellent views gave opportunity to study this 'killing machine!' A Green Woodpecker was vocal and a Yellowhammer called. A little further on a Barn Owl was seen roosting in its nestbox. From the main hide looking out over the reedbed Marsh Harriers were watched hunting and returning to their nestsite. Lapwing had chicks and satisfyingly a Turtle Dove flew over after being heard here and there around the reserve. Soon after, along the track a Spotted Flycatcher foraged from the open branches of an alder tree. After thanking the manager Duncan we left for Little Paxton Pits. Here Nightingales called only occasionally from dense cover. Warblers were still vocal with Blackcap, Garden Warbler, and Whitethroat as well as the inevitable Chiffchaff being heard. Whilst we spent some time near Washout Pit, hoping for a recently reported Great Reed Warbler, we heard Reed Warbler and a distant Cuckoo. A family of young Common Terns lined up on a log on Heronry lake waiting to be fed and a Kingfisher flashed past over the edge of the lake as we returned to the Centre for a welcome drink before leaving.

Bempton Cliffs / Blacktoft Sands - Sunday 10 Jul 2016

We arrived at Bempton at 11am to be met by a guide who led us to the improved Visitor Centre. After watching many Tree Sparrows around the feeders we made our way to the cliffs and soon found nesting Kittiwakes and Guillemots. On the rocks near the breaking waves was a Shag. Many auks and Gannets were feeding offshore and flying over the sea to and from the cliffs in all directions and missing each other!! Gannets were especially impressive diving at breakneck speed as arrows into the water. We soon found Puffins on nearby cliffs from the next viewpoint with plenty of Guillemots and some Razorbills perched precariously on shallow rock ledges. It was evident that Gannets had increased in recent years as there were birds with young close to viewpoints and away from the main nesting colony. Puffins, everyone's favourite, were more numerous than on our last visit two years ago. Over the grassland Meadow Pipits sang, Hirundines fed low over the grass, and a Linnet flock flitted from place to place. A Whitethroat sang on its territory, but we listened in vain for Corn Bunting. We left for Blacktoft Sands where as we entered the reserve the feeders by the path were commanded by Tree Sparrows. Marsh Harriers hunted over the reeds as they had fledged young



to feed. These were very active and almost all black plumaged. From Marshland hide we soon were watching Bearded Tits foraging in the base of reeds. One youngster fed on exposed mud for some 10 minutes delighting all lucky enough to be there at the time. On a stony island Green Sandpipers roosted and preened. In front of the nearby Xerox hide two Spotted Redshank fed on the edge of an island while some 20 Black-tailed Godwits, resplendent in full russet breeding plumage, fed up to their bellies in open water. As we left the hide the swift like shape of a Hobby caught our eye as it sped over nearby trees as it sought the likes of dragonflies. We watched over the reeds from Singleton hide and scrutinised every Marsh Harrier to make sure none had a white rump - a Montagu's Harrier had been seen recently, however we searched in vain except for a hunting Kestrel! Sedge and Reed Warblers flitted in the reeds in front of the hide. We returned to the coach well pleased with a day watching nesting seabirds and birds of wetlands.



Photographs: Gannets; Guillemot; Kittiwake and Puffin - photographer Ray Davies

Ray Davies

Print v Digital - Feedback

So far my very 'short list' of members who wish to opt out of their printed copy of the Newsletter has three names on it. These members will therefore remain on the postal list for the time being but will, in addition, receive a digital copy straight to their inbox following publication. If and when more interest is shown by the membership in opting out these members will be asked again before being removed from the postal list. If you would like to receive a digital copy let me know on newsletter@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk



Birding trip to Speyside, Scotland April 2016

Rob Swift

Between the dates of April 21st & April 26th, our five strong group of West Midland Bird Club members, Adam McPherson, Dave Bate, Kenny Hall, Nigel Talbot and Rob Swift, undertook a self organised, long weekend birding trip to Speyside in Scotland. The purpose of the trip was to hopefully see some of the areas specialities, some of which would be lifers for some participants in the group.

Thursday 21st – Setting out at mid-day, the 425 mile car drive north, was relatively trouble free, with temperatures in the high teens, (something we'd not considered!) as we entered the last throws of our drive into northern Scotland. We arrived at our rented, rural, cottage in the village of Drumuillie, in the early evening, just in time to unpack, then have a quick exploration of the property's fields and natural garden. This last hour of daylight yielded us a few common species, including Song Thrush & Willow Warbler singing in the adjacent scrub and birch trees.

Friday 22nd – We arose at 4.30am and made our way to the RSPB Loch Garten Reserve, with the target bird of Capercaillie in mind. We'd heard that the Lek site at the centre was now less reliable than in the past and this proved to be the case, with a two and half hour vigil being Caper-less, non the less, we were entertained by the Garten Osprey pair, with the female on the nest and the male sitting close by, as the cool morning daylight hours, got underway. A nice male Redstart gave close views, on his adjacent territory and Chaffinch and Coal Tit were numerous on the feeders. On leaving the visitor centre, a scan of a mirror like Loch Garten itself, provided 5 Common Sandpipers around the edges and 8 Goldeneye, 6 Wigeon, Teal, Greylag and Mallard on the water.

On our way back to the cottage for breakfast we paused to scope the perennial flood, outside the village of Boat of Garten. The pool was populated by 7 vocal Little Grebe, a mix of Common, Black-headed and Great black backed Gulls. Redshank were noted around the edges and 20+ Wigeon and 4 Pink-footed Geese, grazed the surrounding rough pasture. Lapwing and Oystercatcher filled the air with their display calls. Back at Pilmuir cottage, a displaying Tree Pipit in the fields, delayed breakfasting proceedings for 10 minutes.

After a hearty breakfast, we headed up to Cairngorm mountain, seeing many Red Grouse on the lower slopes, as we headed for the main car park, arriving at 10.30am. Several pairs of Ring Ouzel were already in residence and good views were had. Jackdaws lingered around the parking area. We decided to take the trail over the slopes, up into the snow zone. After 1.5km, a good ridge area to scope from was found, but it took another 30 minutes to lock onto a Ptarmigan feeding in the part-snow covered areas. Over the next hour, good scope views were had of 4-5 birds, showing various stages of moult into summer plumage. Five well pleased birders descended back to the car park, taking in several Wheatear on the way and a Snipe flitted past.

The afternoon saw us arrive in Findhorn valley, to cool, overcast conditions. As we made our way up to the head of the valley, we paused frequently to scan. On these stops, we took in Dipper, Goosander, Common Sandpiper, Sand Martin, Pied Wagtail and Common Gull, either on or flying down the river. Mistle Thrush sang from the tree tops and a Sparrowhawk arrowed by. Arriving at the head of the valley, we set up for a sky watch and we were soon watching fly past Ravens, numerous soaring Buzzards, a lone Peregrine and 3 Kestrel on the nearby crags. The rough, riverside, grassland held many pairs of Lapwing and Oystercatcher and pairs of Curlew and Golden Plover put in an

appearance, Wheatears flitted amongst the boulders on the nearby scree slopes and a surprise male Ring Ouzel, flew directly over our heads. A probable Golden Eagle was seen by two members of the group, flying away from us at a 2km distance. Late afternoon saw us retreat back down the valley, where we stopped to admire a large herd of Red Deer, grazing in the valley bottom.

Saturday 23rd - We once again awakened well before daylight and headed out on a Capercaillie mission. We had gained some local resident 'intelligence' the evening before and headed off to a location in the vast forest of Abernethy. Walking these forests at 6.00am, on a winter like morn, is a very 'atmospheric' experience and birds have to be worked for. On the paths, 2km into the forest, we scrutinized with concentration and silence, into the trees and we were rewarded with three male Capercaillie at 150m distance. It was a privilege to watch these relaxed birds, for 10-15 minutes before they melted away into the mossy mounds at the base of the Pines. A supporting cast of Coal Tit, Great Tit, Siskin, Mistle Thrush and Chaffinch were observed and Great spotted Woodpecker drummed in the distance. On our way out (for breakfast) we were alerted to some tree tops calls of Crossbill, luckily we located the continuously calling bird and by comparing the call to our own Iphone examples (discreetly to ourselves- not to the bird!) it was a very good match for Scottish Crossbill.

Mid morning found us north-west of Grantown-on-Spey, traversing the moorland road down to Lochindorb, where 3km north east of the loch, a moorland breeding colony of Common Gull was observed either side of the road and the ever present Red Grouse posed prominently or flew low, past. The weather by now had, changed into northerly, blustery wind conditions and the loch surface was choppy, but it didn't take long for us to latch onto 4 Red-throated Divers in fine summer plumage, the highlight of a largely waterbird free, expanse of water apart from a distant view of Mallard and Greylag. The weather conditions had many Sand Martin and Swallow feeding over the surface. Along the loch edges Redshank and Common Sandpiper were seen and the surrounding area held many Meadow Pipit, Wheatear and several wind battling Buzzards.

We now decided to turn our attention to the recent multi reports of White-billed Divers along the Moray coast and pointed our car at Portsoy 70km distant, which seemed to be the 'easiest' place to connect, going by the bird news services. We arrived early afternoon, just pre high tide and found a sheltered place to sea watch. The sea conditions made viewing birds on the surface difficult, but passing birds came thick and fast over several hours. 50+ each of Razorbill, Guillemot, Kittiwake, Fulmar and Gannet, 12 Sandwich Tern, 4 Red throated Diver, 20+ Shag and in the harbour close views of Eider and Rock Pipit, were had. We drew a blank on the White-billed Divers!



Red Grouse - Adam McPherson



Slavonian Grebe - Nigel Talbot

Undeterred we headed west 30km along the coast to Burghead-Hopeman Bay where a single White-billed Diver had been reported, the day before, in calm flat sea conditions. We arrived to find white horses, smashing onto the beach but with true birders spirit, we marched half way along the bay and

took up an elevated, sheltered scanning point. Again we had a Portsoy-esque selection of birds, but we added 4 Long-tailed Duck and Ringed Plover to the list. After about 45 minutes of late afternoon scanning, we found our target....and what a bird, a full summer plumage, White-billed Diver, just 50m off shore, in front. Given the state of the sea, we gained good views, as the bird posed, 'Collins Bird Guide' like, preened and dived in the swell. After about 20 minutes the bird, drifted away from shore into the white crested waves but to say we were happy, was an understatement! On our 60 minute drive back to our base at Pilmuir Cottage, there was only one thing we talked about, although we did divert our attention briefly to several trip tick, Hooded Crows in a tilled field, outside Kinloss.

In the evening, back at our Pilmuir Cottage base, an evening mini-ramble around the fields/woodland edge, yielded a nice roding Woodcock at 9pm!

Sunday 24th - We had a 'lay in' until 6.30am and headed down to the small Avie Lochan, minutes from our cottage, where we soon located and had close studies of a pair of summer plumage Slavonian Grebes in the lochan side, water surface emerging, vegetation. A nice 30 minutes birdwatch provided a supporting cast 2 Goldeneye, 6 Teal, Little Grebe, 3 Bullfinch, 4 Willow Warbler, Common Sandpiper, Mistle Thrush, Sand Martin, Swallow & Siskin.

We again called in at Boat of Garten Flood, where a fifteen minute scan yielded similar species to the day before, but a single Shoveler and 4 Tufted Duck were new on site. It was then on to the Loch Mallachie trail, which was reputed to be good for Crested Tit. We had a couple of hours looking but drew a blank, although numerous Siskin, Chaffinch, Willow Warbler and Coal Tit gave interest on the trail, ending at the Loch, where the view has to be seen to be believed. Mallachie Loch held breeding pairs of Goldeneye, Wigeon, Teal and Greylag and Curlews displayed, their liquid calls reverberated for extreme distance, in the perfect stillness.



Mountain Hare - Kenny Hall



Ring Ouzel - Rob Swift

Cairngorm Mountain was calling once again, so we set off, to see if we could get another Ptarmigan 'fix' in the much sunnier conditions. The Ring Ouzels were noted around the car park once again, but this time we took the funicular railway to the near summit view point. Blue skies, fresh overnight snow, -6 chill factor in the very slight breeze and two good views of distant Ptarmigan were had... these birds are tough! Unfortunately at this point, we lost one member of our group, who was video diaring and thought the rest of us had gone back down (when we hadn't) so descended on the funicular railway himself. An ensuing search by the remaining four of us, found a nicely built snowman outside the summit viewing point and many jokes were passed around that, this in fact was our missing team member, who had stood in one place too long with his camera! The rest of us descended and now reunited on the lower car park, we had brief but good views of 7 Snow Buntings and several Wheatear before we left. The afternoon weather forecast looked like it would provide ideal conditions for soaring Raptors, so we drove the 30km up to Findhorn Valley once again. Only

one mid valley stop this time, taking in similar species to two days previous, but there was a definite increase in Hirundines migrating north along the river and we had a good view of a Red Squirrel way up high, in a pine.

Joining a few other birders we set up at a good 360 degree view point alongside the river, to scan the surrounding hill sides. Over the next hour, many Buzzards, 2 Kestrels, Peregrine and 4 Raven entertained us and the grassland waders went about their business. An additional birder to the gathering, informed us that he'd been watching a Golden Eagle, 30 minutes before, 5km back down the valley, we soon found ourselves at the spot he described. Twenty minutes passed, then a 'Goldie' came into view over the summit of the hill, joined by another, they simply rode the thermals, on the opposite side of the valley. At one point the sub-adult and adult bird were joined by a third bird, a sub adult, which landed on the hillside for five minutes. We agreed, that this was birding at its best and after about an hour of viewing them, they drifted off east, from whence they came. We didn't think it could get much better than this, but we decided to have a slow drive back up the valley. We stopped to inform a small group of birders being led by a guide, about the Golden Eagles and he informed us that an hour before they'd seen one at the head/end of the valley and 'maybe' a White-tailed Eagle, although they hadn't been reported for weeks in the area.

Now stationed right at Findhorn Valley head, we again had our 'eyes to the skies' into the increasing cloud. A few Wheatears and Meadow Pipits, came to have a look at us and the increasing cloud and breeze after 45 minutes was beginning to wain our enthusiasm, suddenly an "Eagles in view", shout went up. Two birds of prey came into view 2km distant, it was soon noted that one was quite a lot bigger, broader winged and 'stumpy' tailed than the other and we realised as they came nearer, that we were looking at an adult White-tailed Eagle and a sub adult Golden Eagle. Now at about 1km distant, we had really good views for 10 minutes, until the 'Goldie' lost interest and drifted off. We continued to watch the single White-tailed Eagle until another Eagle ascended to accompany it, mistakenly presuming it was the Golden Eagle back again until one of the group (who'd been concentrating more) called up that it was an additional White-tailed Eagle, this time a younger bird, but it was carrying prey. We continued to take in these two 'flying barn doors' for the next 25 fantastic minutes, as they interacted, soared for the joy of it and the younger one eating its prey on the wing. After they had descended to a cliff face out of sight, we left the valley by a different, over moorland, route, ticking Stonechat and getting very close views of Mountain Hare on the way. A pair of Whooper Swan, grazing in a riverside field, near Inverarnie was a nice addition to the trip list, on our way back to base.

Monday 25th - An early start again, this time to a countryside with a dusting layer of snow and ominous skies. We had decided to go on a Caper mission again but more importantly to try and track down Crested Tit (elusive at this time of year). We were back in our forest location by 6.30am, this time we had even better views of calling, Scottish Crossbill, supported by Siskins, Raven, Buzzard and Mistle Thrush whose song eerily drifted through the forest. The Caper were on a 'no-show' this morn and enthusiasm was lowering as sleet started to fall, then a call was heard that was most certainly a Crested Tit. After several minutes a small roving flock of birds was located and two Crested Tit were picked out amongst them. The other birds moved on but the Crested Tit pair remained for 5 minutes, gleaning invisible food off the needles of the Pine, 10 metres from us, satisfying views were had and a sought after trip species ticked (a lifer for 3 of the group).

After an extended breakfast, we headed out to re-visit Lochindorb. The weather by now, was increasingly stormy, with virtual snow shower white outs for 20 minutes, contrasting with bright sunshine the next...challenging birding conditions. We headed over the moor towards the Loch, past the Common Gull colony, whose occupants blended in well with their white surroundings. We scanned the rough surface of the large loch and picked up a Diver in flight...a Black-throated flying around the corner and out of site! We needed to get better views and after we relocated the bird it

led us a merry dance, as it fished up and down the loch, 30-50 metres or so off shore. We observed from the car, as it battled the loch's waves...it was an absolute stunner in fine, breeding plumage and we were amazed after it dived to fish, how far it travelled under water, up to 100 metres, before it resurfaced.



Black throated Diver - Adam McPherson



Snow Bunting - Kenny Hall

After leaving Lochindorb, we visited the nearby river gorge at Dulsie Bridge. In a sunny break in the weather, we took touristy photo's of the very old, high back, stone bridge, the gorge and the waterfall, however at least one of the group stuck to the birding task in hand and he was rewarded with fly past Dipper and Grey Wagtail, over the rapids.

After a 50 minute drive, we arrived at Findhorn Bay on the Moray coast in time for a picnic lunch, sheltering in the coastal gorse whilst taking it, we had Linnets and a Hooded Crow for company. The wintry storms were really rolling in now from the north, snow, hail, rain, you name it and our sea-watch was soon abandoned, save stripping our expensive Spotting scope lenses of their optical coatings! Retreating to the inner Findhorn bay, which is relatively more protected, we had an enjoyable hour, adding to our list Shelduck, Ringed Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit. There was a flock of 23 Pink-footed Geese, grazing on the saltmarsh alongside many Oystercatcher and Redshank. Several Sandwich Tern and a distant Osprey fished on the far side of the large, sandy bay.

Due to the weather, we arrived back at our base, earlier than planned but very satisfied with our four bird filled, Speyside days and to kind of sign it off nicely, the roding Woodcock again put in a fly past appearance, to the rear of the cottage at dusk.

Tuesday 26th - It was winter overnight and after de-icing/de-snowing the car we headed south. The day before a Kentish Plover had been reported at Audenshaw Reservoir, east of Manchester. It was decided that if the bird came up on the bird news services, on our way back, we would take a de-tour to try and see it and sure enough it was still reported as present. Five and a half hours later, we were stood at the edge of the concrete basin of the reservoir, enjoying very good views of the Kentish Plover, a lifer for some of the group, a U.K tick for the others...a fine conclusion to the trip!

For those WMBC members thinking of doing a Speyside trip for the specialities, then a minimum four day trip is ideal, as it gives a chance to re-visit locations for second chance birds etc and also time to visit various habitats and give some time to each. Ideal timing is March, April, May - earlier in the period for better chance of Caper, Ptarmigan and Crested Tit but mid-later in the period for summer plumage Divers, Grebes and returning/passage migrants etc.

For self planned trips, then the Aviemore - Granttown-on-Spey corridor is an ideal location to base yourself, as many sites are on the doorstep and the coast is less than an hours drive.

We stayed at Pilmuir Cottage in the hamlet of Drumuillie, just north of Aviemore. An ideal cottage, sleeping up to seven, with good birding habitat outside the backdoor and feeders to watch, whilst having breakfast! www.speysidecottage.co.uk for information.

In addition to information that can be found on the internet, a good trip accompaniment can be found in the birding locations book, 'Best Birdwatching Sites in the Scottish Highlands' by Gordon Hamlett.

Rob Swift

From the Editor's Postbag

A response to the mail from Martyn Yapp and Kay Donaghy, printed last issue, from Jim Winsper

Hi Kay, Martyn,

On receiving my 2016 summer issue of the WMBC Newsletter I read with great interest your observation of a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming on a plastic panel box that is attached to a telegraph pole. You ask for any other encounters of a similar nature and I thought that you would be equally interested in my findings.

During the mid 1990s whilst in our garden, my wife and I became aware of a very loud and recurring metallic drumming. We located the sound to a nearby metal construction electricity pylon where we observed a male Great Spotted Woodpecker hammering on the framework. As you can imagine the sound of the bird's bill drumming on metal was exceptionally loud and far carrying and I came to the same conclusion as you, in that the bird was taking advantage of this in announcing his territory. What prompted the bird to choose the metal structure in the first place, or for that matter the plastic box in your instance, is intriguing. Whether by design or accident, it clearly works but in the case of my bird there are plenty of traditional drumming posts in the vicinity as can be heard every springtime.

Since that first encounter we have witnessed Great Spotted Woodpecker doing the same thing on the same pylon on several occasions at the appropriate time of year, spring 2015 being the most recent and, clearly involving more than one generation of birds over this approximate 20 year time span, which in itself is interesting. Despite the impact that this must have on the bill and head, the birds clearly feel that it's worthwhile and have little hesitation in using it.

Like yourselves, I was fascinated with this behaviour and felt the need to share it with others. I placed a note similar to yours in the then WMBC Bulletin, under the title - 'Electronic mail, avian style'. Likewise, my encounter was met with some curiosity but your experience is the first that I have been made aware of concerning a Great Spotted Woodpecker improvising in such a way. Thanks for sharing your observation and I hope you find my encounter of interest.

Postscript.

Since my response to Kay and Martyn I decided to delve further into this phenomenon and I am now aware of several videos of woodpecker species drumming on a variety of metal surfaces. These videos can be viewed on YouTube by typing into the search box 'woodpecker drumming on metal' or similar wording. This is clearly not an everyday occurrence yet apparently nothing more than a bird showing initiative which is obviously well documented and worldwide as confirmed by the species involved.

Jim Winsper

From the Editor's Postbag

And how about this for a grand finale?

Hi Sue

We help out with a hedgehog rescue and have hedgehogs in secure runs and plenty free roaming that visit nightly to feed from the feeding stations. We have two Bushnell naturecam HD cameras out every night to monitor what the hedgehogs are getting up to. Usually the SD card is filled up with shots of Magpies, Wood Pigeons and Collared Doves that frequent our feeders. Usually I do a quick scan of the images and only keep any with hedgehog on so that I can add them to the blog. On this particular day I nearly deleted this image but thought "that is an odd Collared Dove". We thought it might be a hybrid but kept thinking Turtle Dove so we emailed the photo to our friend and bird expert Chas Mason who confirmed it was a Turtle Dove

I posted it on twitter and I know Kev Clements saw it. So this is a small garden about 300m from New Hall Valley in Sutton Coldfield. What was a turtle dove doing in our garden? This is where the silence of a night camera trumped over us trying to photograph it with a digital camera plus at that time we were still in bed!

I thought I would share this with you

Best wishes

Yvonne & Peter Moore

Membership no 4188



Camera Name0 53°F11°C



05-23-2016 07:48:45

And Finally

Has this issue jogged your mind, recalling a birding experience of your own which you could share with other members? Have you got a photograph you would like to see on our cover? Will you write a trip or 'my patch' report or anything else bird related? I am totally dependent on you for the winter issue, please don't disappoint me but more importantly our members.

Sue

Suggestions - The officers of the club welcome suggestions and feedback from the membership regarding any aspect of our club. Please send them to the most appropriate officer or, if in doubt to Mark, our Secretary who will pass them on.

Next Issue - The Winter issue of your newsletter will go to press by mid-November and should be on your door mats at the beginning of December. Please send your contributions to the editor by 1st November **at the latest. Anything received after this cut off date will be held over until the Spring issue.**

WMBC Officers

President - W.E. Oddie O.B.E.

Vice Presidents - F.C. Gribble M.B.E.
A.J. Richards, G.R. Harrison

Chairman - Kevin Clements,
26 Hambrook Close, Dunstall Park,
Wolverhampton, WV6 0XA
Email: chair@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Deputy Chairman - Roger Broadbent,
Maple Cottage, 8 Home Farm Court, Ingestre
Stafford ST18 0PZ
deputy-chair@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Honorary Secretary - Mark Rickus,
27 Ringmere Avenue, Castle Bromwich B36 9AT
Email: secretary@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Honorary Treasurer - A. Thomas
24 Awbridge Road, Dudley, West Midlands,
DY2 0JA
Email: treasurer@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Membership Secretary - John Hoyle,
16 Brendan Close, Coleshill, Birmingham,
B46 3EF
Email: membership@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Permits Secretary - As Honorary Secretary
Email: permits@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Press Officer - As Honorary Secretary
Email: press@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Annual Report Editor - D.W. Emley,
23 Leacroft, Stone, Staffordshire ST15 8GF
Email: report@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Website - Jim Winsper
32 Links Road, Hollywood, Birmingham B14 4TP
Email: website@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Newsletter Editor - Sue Judge
3 Fennel Close, Cheslyn Hay, WS6 7DZ
Email: newsletter@westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Advertising
Enquiries regarding advertising in this publication should be addressed to the Editor.

Small ads of direct benefit to members and 'for sale' items from members will be normally be included free of charge, space permitting.

The WMBC is a Registered Charity (number 213311), serving birdwatchers, ornithologists and all who have an interest in the birds of Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and the West Midlands Counties.



Website - westmidlandbirdclub.org.uk

Twitter account @WestMidBirdClub

THE BIRDERS STORE

We stock the UK's largest range of optics and accessories for birders including **Acuter, Barr & Stroud, Celestron, Country Innovation, Cullmann, Eagle, Hawke, Helios, Hilkinson, Kite, Kowa, Leica, Meade, Minox, Optech, Opticon, Skua, Steiner, Swarovski, Tilley, Vanguard, Velbon, Viking, Visionary, Vortex** and **Zeiss** together with an extensive range of **birding books** and **DVDs**.



SLC: Perfection meets tradition



CL Pocket
8x25 | 10x25



SWAROVSKI
OPTIK
PREMIER DEALER

Unit 7 King Charles Place, St John's, Worcester WR2 5AJ Opening Hours: 9.30am - 4.30pm Tuesday to Saturday

Tel: **01905 312877** | Email: sales@birders-store.co.uk | Web: www.birders-store.co.uk

THE BIRDERS STORE in-store | online | telephone