

# Sussex Ornithological Society



**Newsletter**  
**Winter 2014-15**





**Front Cover:** Red Kite, The Burgh  
27/9/14 (Jan Paul Charteris)

**This page:** Wryneck, Beachy  
Head 5/9/14 (David Potter),  
Tawny Pipit, Newhaven 10/10/14  
(Malcolm Freeman).

**Inside back:** White-winged  
Black Tern, Rye Harbour 19/10/14  
(Malcolm Freeman), Red-  
breasted Flycatcher, Beachy  
Head 24/10/14 (Sandra Palme),  
Jay, Pulborough Brooks 2/10/14  
(Gareth Hughes).

**Back cover:** Little Stint,  
Widewater 7/9/14 (Luke Dray),  
Great White Egret, Weir Wood  
Res 9/9/14 (Derek Washington).



# Editorial

## Memory Lane

Earlier this year I took a short cut down the street in Hove where we lived when I was a kid in the 1960s, the first time I'd been that way for years. Of course it was lined with cars, when before only three or four families had one, but I was expecting that. All the family houses had been converted into flats, and many of the front gardens had been either paved over for parking or covered with purple stones and exotic plants, but I was ready for that too. But there was another more subtle difference. Collared Doves cooed from the back gardens and Goldfinches tinkled overhead, but the constant chirping of sparrows, part of the soundtrack of my childhood, had gone.



Since 2000, bird populations have been one of the Government's 15 headline quality of life indicators, and there are now projects all over the country to improve people's mental and physical health and community involvement through contact with the natural world. One of the most fascinating of these is London Wildlife Trust's Cockney Sparrow project, based on a Council estate in the East End, which has succeeded in bringing people of all ages and backgrounds together and improved the environment for the birds at the same time.

I don't expect to see the Bullfinches I watched on our bird table from the kitchen window any more, nor the Tawny Owl sitting on a TV aerial I saw from my bedroom, but I'm hoping that their close connection with our urban life and folklore will be the thing that makes us look after our sparrows.

The above editorial is the personal opinion of the Editor and may not be that of the SOS as a whole

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# SOS News

## Newsletter Editor – post still vacant!

We still have not found anyone to edit this Newsletter from next April, and if no-one comes forward we may be in the position of no longer being able to produce it. This is an interesting and creative job and quite fun to do, and if you have limited time available the present editor is happy to continue to do much of the background work and give any support needed. You don't need to be an expert birder or a long-standing member, but you will need good English and IT skills. If you are even slightly interested, contact Chris Barfield (see back page) as soon as possible.

## SOS AGM - a date for your 2015 diary

Our 2015 AGM will be held on Saturday 11 April at 2.30 pm at The Adastra Hall, Hassocks, after which Peter Hughes of the RSPB will give us a talk about the wonderfully successful Medmerry reserve.

## Bird Racing 2015!

It was time for a change in the 2014 Race. With the Bald Eagles not participating the field was wide open, and it was a new team – the Wallcreepers (Luke Dray, George Kinnard, Jake Gearty and Russell Brown) who were the worthy winners, and in fact the only team to get over 100 species. Between them the 11 teams raised a wonderful £1,326.20 (including Gift Aid).

A reminder of the main rules for the Race:

- it must be carried out in the first two weeks of January
- you must confine yourself to within the borders of Sussex
- teams should consist of at least 2 people
- all members of the team should see or hear the species claimed, unless the team consists of 4 or more, in which case 3 must record the species.

Christmas and New Year are a good time to organise your teams and try to get sponsorship – though some teams just give a personal donation. And you can set your own parameters; The Muppets confined themselves to the Selsey Peninsula last year, while the Henfield team is still trying to record 60 species in its home parish for the first time, having got to 59 three times now! And the team which scored the lowest total last year still managed to see one species no-one else did – a Spoonbill.

Money raised goes into our funds for use in grants to other organisations for land purchase or conservation work. 2014 has been an expensive year! The Society has given £11,500 towards work at Graffham Common which will deliver great benefits to heathland birds, and £17,000 to assist the RSPB in helping the breeding Little Terns at Paghham. There will no doubt be many other calls upon our resources over the next few years, so help us to put some money back – while having an enjoyable and challenging day out in the field.

If you are unable to participate yourself, you may wish to consider sponsoring one of the participating teams.

Good luck!

The Race Pack for 2015 is available now from Val Bentley (see back page).

## Annual Conference

If you haven't already booked your place on the forthcoming Conference on 24 January but would like to attend, contact Val Bentley (see back page) to check whether there are any places left.

## British Trust for Ornithology Strategy Green Paper

The BTO produced a Strategy Green Paper in May and in June invited Bird Clubs to respond to a set of 14 questions. On behalf of members, the Scientific Committee and Council sent a reply to those questions which were particularly relevant to the Society.

One of our questions was with regard to BTO allowing Bird Clubs to share with third parties,

including the Biodiversity Record Centres (BRC), **all** BTO data including Wetland Bird and Breeding Bird Surveys (WeBs & BBS), as the BRCs respond to enquiries for environmental data with regard to planning applications etc.

The BTO explained that partnership agreements for some surveys preclude them from sharing this information, but that they very much hope to change these in future.

Another question was to ask if BTO could supply BBS data in time for the information to be included in the records sent to species accounts writers for *The Sussex Bird Report*, and we are pleased to say that the BTO plan to do this in future.

If you would like to see a copy of the comments sent to BTO by SOS, this can be requested from [secretary@sos.org.uk](mailto:secretary@sos.org.uk)



## SOS grants

SOS Council has recently approved several grants to projects in Sussex which will directly benefit birds. We have given £11,500 to SWT towards restoration of heathland at Graffham Common, a project which will link up several existing heathland blocks and help the spread of Nightjar, Woodlark, Dartford Warbler and Stonechat. Earlier this year we agreed to donate £17,000 to the RSPB towards measures to protect the precarious Little Tern colony at Pagham Harbour. The vigilance of SOS member Bernie Forbes has led to a grant of £640 to the National Trust towards fencing off the yew trees at Cissbury Ring. These trees are regularly favoured by migrating Ring Ouzels in autumn, but were about to be felled to increase the grazing area for cattle.



## They made it!

**T**he two Cuckoos we sponsored this year for the BTO's tagging project have both made the perilous journey to Africa. Ash and Chester were tagged in Ashdown Forest in May and named by the children at two primary schools in the area. They were among a total of 17 Cuckoos tagged this year by the BTO, all sponsored by individuals, companies and bird clubs.

After crossing France, Ash took an easterly route via Italy and Croatia before crossing the Med and the Sahara, and in mid-November he is now in Congo, in the same general rainforest area as most of the other Cuckoos. Chester took a longer, more westerly route, perhaps to avoid a long desert crossing, and ended up in the Ivory Coast, rather further north west than the main group. Both birds will probably now stay where they are during the course of our winter.

Satellite tagging gives us detailed information about the birds' movements in real time, and much has already been learnt about their migration strategies, stopover areas and final destinations, much of this information completely changing what we assumed before. The tags are solar-powered, transmitting for 10 hours and then going into 'sleep' mode for 48 hours. The information gained will help us to find out why we have lost over half of our breeding Cuckoos in the last 25 years.



**Ash**



**Chester**

## Breeding Bird Survey

BBS volunteers in Sussex have made 2014 yet another record year in terms of coverage, with an amazing 160 squares surveyed. The results are still being collated and analysed, but look out for more information in future newsletters. Surveying a BBS square requires just two visits each year to a randomly selected 1-km square, and according to the BTO “is one of the



easiest ways to make a real difference to bird conservation”. That “real difference” is now becoming apparent in Sussex, because dedicated volunteers now collect enough data to enable the calculation each year of reliable population trends for common breeding species. The trends for the period 1994-2013 are presented in the 2013 Sussex Bird Report. Of the 37 species for which trends can be calculated, 11 have declined significantly since 1994 and 14 have increased significantly. Of particular concern are the population trends for Mistle Thrush and Starling; the calculations show that both species are declining dramatically in Sussex. Population trends will be re-calculated every year for an increasing number of species, making the BBS a really powerful conservation tool in the county. Enormous thanks are due to all of the volunteers involved, both past and present.

If you would like to be a part of the BBS in Sussex, the squares for which volunteers are currently needed for the 2015 season are:

SU7802 near Chidham  
SU7907 Funtington  
SU8311 near Stoughton  
SU8404 near Fishbourne  
SU8624 Tote Hill nr Midhurst  
SU9027 near Fernhurst

SZ7996 East Wittering  
TQ0109 Arundel Park  
TQ0320 near Pulborough  
TQ1606 near Sompting  
TQ2021 near Cowfold  
TQ2022 near Cowfold



TQ2425 near Warninglid  
TQ2631 Tilgate Forest  
TQ2721 near Hickstead  
TQ3031 near Balcombe  
TQ4233 Broadstone Warren  
TQ5231 near Crowborough  
TQ5502 near Lullington Heath

TQ5738 Tunbridge Wells  
TQ6706 Hooe Level  
TQ6927 near Etchingham  
TQ7028 near Hurst Green  
TQ7111 near Ninfield  
TQ7224 nr Robertsbridge  
TQ7811 Hollington (Hastings)

If you would like to volunteer, or want to find out more, contact me (see back page). There is also lots of information about the BBS at **www.bto.org/bbs**. Other squares nearer to where you live might become available before the spring, so please get in touch if you're interested. If you feel you'd like to have a go but lack confidence, help and support from experienced volunteers can be arranged, and some informal training sessions are planned for March 2015 to which new volunteers will be invited. You don't need to be an expert, but should be able to recognise common and widespread birds by sight and sound.

**Helen Crabtree, BBS Regional Organiser**

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### **BTO Atlas goes digital**

The BTO 2007-11 Bird Atlas is now available as an ebook via the BTO website. The winter and summer distribution maps are also available as an addition to the Collins Bird Guide app (see page 13).



## BTO House Martin Survey 2015

The BTO want to discover more about House Martins to help identify why this species is declining and to provide scientific evidence to inform policy decisions. The BTO will therefore be running a national House Martin survey over the next two years to collect more information on population size, breeding ecology and habitat preferences. In 2015 a national random square survey will involve volunteers visiting pre-selected 1-km squares to search for House Martin nests, and in 2016 a nest monitoring study will involve volunteers making regular observations at individual nests to collect information about nesting activity.



Many volunteers will be needed to survey the required random squares in Sussex, and it is also hoped that further squares can be added to extend the survey as far as possible. Please contact Helen Crabtree (see back page) if you would be interested in surveying either a random or a self-chosen square in 2015. It would also be helpful if House Martin nest sites used in 2014 or in previous years could be reported in BirdTrack with appropriate dates, breeding codes and 6-figure grid references.

## 400 – well almost!

by David H Howey, SOS Recorder

Two years ago in the Autumn 2012 SOS Newsletter I invited members to predict what the 400<sup>th</sup> species to be added to the Sussex list would be. At that time the list stood at 397 as we awaited the BBRC decision on the Hooded Merganser in Pagham Harbour – was it an escape or a genuinely wild bird? BBRC decided that it was a wild bird, which brought us up to 398.

In all, 24 species were predicted to be number 400. Top of the list with three nominations was Audouin's Gull followed by Pallid Swift, Little Swift, Black Woodpecker and Zitting Cisticola all with two votes. The following species were only suggested once: Fea's Petrel, Griffon Vulture, Red-necked Stint, Western Sandpiper, South Polar Skua, Armenian Gull, Crested Tit, Rufous Turtle Dove, Black Lark, Eastern Crowned Warbler, Siberian Chiffchaff, Iberian Chiffchaff, Short-toed Treecreeper, Lanceolated Warbler, White-throated Robin, Blue Rock Thrush, Spanish Sparrow, Two-barred Crossbill and Arctic Redpoll.

It's interesting that four of the species mentioned (Griffon Vulture, South Polar Skua, Armenian Gull and Black Woodpecker) are not currently on the British list. In the case of Siberian Chiffchaff, the member nominating that species clearly anticipated that the BOURC would split it from Common Chiffchaff. As far as White-throated Robin is concerned, I'm sorry but the Robin with a white throat which has frequented the gardens of the Coastguard Cottages at Cuckmere doesn't count!

What nobody anticipated was that number 399 would be a Semipalmated Plover in Chichester Harbour. Full details will appear in SxBR 2013.

In the last SOS Newsletter (Autumn 2014), Chris Barfield mentioned the Short-toed Eagle at Ashdown Forest which would – subject to acceptance by BBRC – be number 400. Given the number of birders who saw the bird and the excellent photos of it - such as the one on the back cover of the last Newsletter - I'm confident that the record will be accepted.

If that is the case then the Sussex list will finally have reached 400. However, nobody anticipated that one either so the £50 offered as a prize remains in the SOS coffers.

# Sophie May Lewis



## A Scilly Month

*This October, Sophie spent three weeks as an Ornithology Intern with the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust.*

The last few days of September were a rush of excitement and expectation. I arrived on the Isles of Scilly around lunchtime on a sunny, calm, Wednesday October 1<sup>st</sup>. From the crowded railings of the RMS Scillonian III, day-trippers 'ooh'd and pointed, cameras snapping. Persil-white Gannets, with their inky wingtips and cream-coloured heads, had accompanied us across the 28 miles from the mainland, peeling away over the waves as we approached the islands. October is traditionally a fabulous month for birding on Scilly, when autumn gales and low-pressure systems draw birds down from the Arctic, the eastern coast of America and across from the continent, and the archipelago's 40 plus resident breeding species are joined by an unpredictable variety of migrant birds. I was met on the quay by Rob, one of the Wildlife Trust Rangers, and Ed Marshall, Volunteer Media Officer, and was soon beginning just under 4 weeks of my life that I will not be forgetting in a long while.

First task: familiarise myself with Scilly, particularly St Mary's, where I was based. Taking just over an hour to walk from one end to the other, this is the largest of the islands. Elm trees line many of the high-banked lanes, a rare sight at home. The small flower-growing fields (seaweed-fertilised and pesticide-free) are bordered by tall, dense hedges of introduced *Pittosporum*, which insulates them, coaxing the bulbs into unseasonably early bloom. The perfect place for birdlife to shelter from Atlantic winds! With two wetland nature reserves, one wet woodland, and miles of heathland along the coastline, there was plenty to explore.

Second task: run an awareness campaign for the Trust, with the visiting birders as the main audience. That meant time spent in the office designing posters, writing blogs, contributing to social media, and

drafting new temporary interpretation panels for the nature reserves. And each evening there was Bird Log to attend. Throughout the day, visiting birders spread out across the islands, congregating from time to time on the quay for the next boat or at cafés and pubs. But in the evening they come, in twos and threes, gathering within reach of the bar in the Scillonian Club, to discuss the day's sightings. Terms such as 'dipping', 'stonking bird' and 'crippling views' were regular vocabulary. A select elite of seasoned Scillonian birders were entrusted with the calling of the log, the record of the day's sightings. It was a serious business, infused with a good helping of witty comments and good-hearted banter, that strain of humour unique to birders.

Friday 10th October was an important day in my month's volunteering. I joined the rest of the team of volunteers and rangers to help the Seabird Recovery Project with a big task - a full island beach clean on St Agnes and Gugh. These two islands, joined by a tidal sand bar, have been the focus of this project, which has been working to protect the internationally important breeding seabird populations (this has been a huge success: Manx Shearwater chicks successfully fledged this year for the first time in living memory!). The biggest part of the work has been a concerted effort to eradicate Brown Rats from the island, but the project has taken on other work such as habitat management, environmental education and beach cleans. Before long we were shedding coats and jumpers under the sun, remarkably strong for near-mid October. Odd flip-flops were a common find, whilst plastic water bottles were by far the most frequent. Fishing lines and nets were pulled from where they had wrapped around rocks, lumps of foam were retrieved from thick beds of tide-line seaweed. Curlews called and Oystercatchers flickered over the rocks. Wrens jittered between the rocks and boulders, or rattled grumpily at us from the thick brambles. I have never known a place where my favourite bird is quite so plentiful.

Three weeks flew past and it was soon almost time to think about heading home. I left Scilly basking in late autumn afternoon sunshine and the following morning, as daylight strengthened in the sky over Penzance and Mounts Bay, my Scilly adventure was well and truly over.

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## Sussex Bird Report Papers

Contributions in the form of original articles on all aspects of ornithology are invited for publication in the Sussex Bird Report.

Scientific articles can cover any aspect of ornithology likely to be of interest to birdwatchers in Sussex. Possible subjects would be the results of any local study or research project, the current status of any species or group of species within Sussex, the impact of conservation measures on species populations, or factors affecting migration patterns or other movements observed in Sussex. Articles need not be highly technical but should be scientific in nature and written in the usual style of a scientific paper.

Authors are encouraged to send their work to other ornithologists for critical assessment and comment prior to submission, and such help received should be acknowledged within the article. After submission, articles may be reviewed by the SOS Scientific Committee, or by relevant experts in Sussex. Suggested revisions will be discussed and agreed with authors. Final drafts will be typeset and the finished PDF versions will be sent to authors for checking before publication. If the Sussex Bird Report editorial team considers that an article is more suited for publication in the SOS quarterly newsletter, then with the permission of the author the draft will be sent to the Newsletter Editor.

Articles are accepted on the understanding that they have not been and will not be published elsewhere, and they are subject to editorial revision. Articles should be submitted as Word files by email to Helen Crabtree at [hcrabtree@gmail.com](mailto:hcrabtree@gmail.com). Any photographs to be included should also be submitted to the photographic editor Nick Bond at [nickbcfc@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nickbcfc@yahoo.co.uk) along with a copy of the article. Further details about the preferred presentation of articles can be obtained from Helen Crabtree.

Articles intended for publication in the 2014 Sussex Bird Report should be submitted before the end of June 2015. Articles received after that date will be considered for publication in subsequent years.

**Helen Crabtree, Editor of Scientific Papers for the Sussex Bird Report**

# Odds & Ends

## Collins Field Guide app

Smartphone users have long been awaiting a fully comprehensive field guide app covering the whole of Europe – and here it is! The Collins Field Guide, long regarded as the ‘birders bible’, released this app in August this year. Much more than just the field guide, it includes sound recordings, and as extras you can get videos and the BTO Atlas UK distribution maps. Surprisingly it’s only available for iPhone and iPad and not Android. You can find a full review in the Birdguides webzine (<http://www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?a=4537>). Available from the App Store at £12.99.



## Sanderling records needed

The Sanderling Project Group, which is part of the International Wader Study Group (IWSG), would like help in gaining more insights into Sanderling breeding success this year and are asking SOS members to send them Sanderling records. Research in the High Arctic suggests that fewer juveniles may be expected this year, due to extensive snowfall and a slow melt. Clutches were laid very late, were often incomplete and suffered from a lot of predation.



Mick Davis

The group would like to find out how bad this year’s reproduction has been by receiving records of Sanderlings, with age information. For more information about the project, a guide to ageing Sanderlings, and information about where to send records, please contact Clare Buckle ([surveys@sos.org.uk](mailto:surveys@sos.org.uk))

## Winter birding - Southwick Beach and Canal

by Chris Barfield

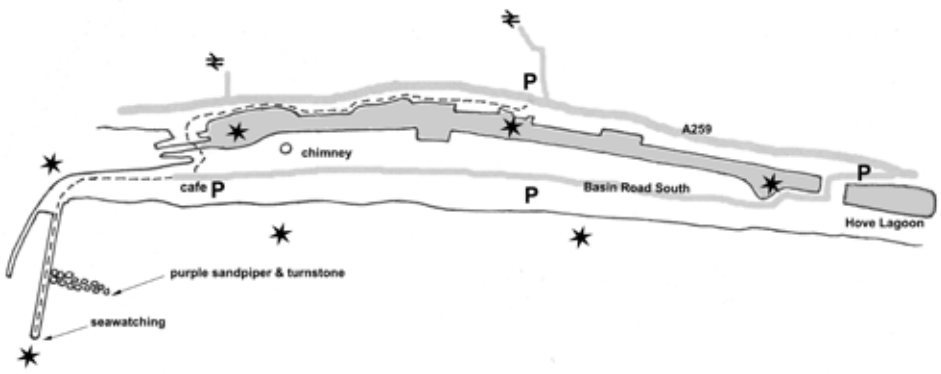
The belt of commerce and industry along the A259 between Hove and Shoreham doesn't at first look all that promising for birds, but the undisturbed shoreline and the shelter of the canal often turn up interesting sightings. The area can be covered easily on foot and there are good train and bus links.

Starting from Hove Lagoon you can follow the road west along the shore (Basin Road South), but check the lagoon itself first – a Long-tailed Duck spent most of December here in 2007 and there was a Grey Phalarope on the paddling pool earlier this year! You can get a good view down the canal from the back of the fish shop (a Little Auk was also here in December 2007) and also from the bend further on. Check out all the gulls in the area too – Iceland and Glaucous are occasional visitors. The foreshore along this stretch attracts Black Redstarts, pipits and other passerines, plus Turnstones and sometimes Sanderlings. There are often flocks of roosting gulls on the beach, and keep an eye on the sea for grebes, mergansers, divers, auks and whatever else might be passing by!

The road ends at a very popular café, a welcome refuelling stop after the long walk along the beach, and tea and a bacon sandwich will go down nicely! Until recently the power station chimney had a Peregrine nestbox installed, and there may still be one or two birds around. You can carry on to the end of the east pier for a good view over the harbour entrance and sea. There's a good chance of Purple Sandpiper on the rocky breakwater there and there are usually Rock Pipits around. Return to the cafe and cross over the lock gates to the other side of the canal.

From the other side of the lock you can walk back east along the towpath, where you might catch an auk, grebe or diver on the canal (I've had Black-necked Grebe here). Check the jetties on the south side too, these attract roosting gulls and are worth checking for the more unusual species, especially at weekends when there's less activity. The grassy areas and scrub on the canal banks can add Stonechat and other passerines to your list. The path comes to an end at the timber merchants - rejoin the A259 at the bottom of Church Road and return to Hove on foot or catch a bus or train.





# Recent Sightings

by Peter Denyer

## August

This was an often unsettled month with large daily rainfall totals in some areas. Ex-Hurricane 'Bertha' passed over the UK on the 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> bringing some unseasonably windy and wet weather, before moving into the North Sea and maintaining a cool and showery regime. The second half of the month saw some notably cool days and nights with some early ground frosts.

A Spoonbill on the 1<sup>st</sup> was the first bird of note, along with four Yellow-legged Gulls at various sites on the Selsey Peninsula, and on the same day all five Black-winged Stilts were seen at Sidlesham Ferry Pool before taking a brief trip to Pulborough Brooks on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. A Grasshopper Warbler was very showy at Beachy Head on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, and on the 4<sup>th</sup> a skua that had been lingering off Church Norton was identified as a



Pectoral Sandpiper (Chris Barfield)

Long-tailed, which then went on to give great views to many birders over the next ten days or so. A Cattle Egret at Marsh Farm (Pagham Harbour) on the 6<sup>th</sup> was good compensation for those who missed out on the skua, and the regular leucistic Curlew was also showing in the Harbour during this time. On the 7<sup>th</sup> a Pied Flycatcher was at Seaford Head, and on the 9<sup>th</sup> Pulborough Brooks received one of its near annual Pectoral Sandpipers, which lingered for a few days as the previous birds have done. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, seawatching turned up a nice record of two Balearic Shearwaters off Splash Point. On the 16<sup>th</sup> a Melodious Warbler was found

**a Melodious Warbler was found at Beachy Head**

at Beachy Head, though typically it was quite elusive, and an equally unusual record from Rusper was that of a late brood of Goldfinches, still in the nest. A Great White Egret was seen flying down the Arun on the 18<sup>th</sup>, while on the same day the first Osprey of the month flew over Ringmer. The next day a presumed juvenile male Montagu's Harrier flew inland at Birling Gap.

### **a group of young birders had a very good day...**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> a group of young birders had a very good day, finding another (or the same?) Melodious Warbler at Beachy Head and a Great White Egret flying over the Cuckmere. The third Melodious Warbler for Beachy

Head in a week was found at Hodcombe on the 21<sup>st</sup>, a much worn Honey-buzzard was seen between Runcton and Marsh Farm on the 24<sup>th</sup>, and a Black Tern was at Weir Wood Reservoir the following day. On the 26<sup>th</sup> at Seaford Head what may have been the fourth Melodious Warbler in the county in 10 days caused frustration for the finder, being once again elusive. On the 28<sup>th</sup> one lucky observer had a Crane and an Osprey flying in the same field of view over Rye Harbour, and the same day the first of a deluge of Wrynecks was found at Selsey Bill, followed by one at Beachy Head on 30<sup>th</sup> and another at Seaford Head on the 31<sup>st</sup>. More were to follow. . . .

## **September**

The month was dominated by high pressure, bringing plenty of fine and settled early autumn weather, with only a few short interruptions. This was provisionally the driest September since 1910, though only slightly drier than 1959. It was also the driest calendar month for the UK since August 1995. The country's September maximum temperature of 26.3 °C was recorded at Wiggonholt (West Sussex) on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

A Great White Egret remained at Arundel WWT from August, with a Wryneck also lingering at Hope Gap. Another Wryneck was reported at Queen's Park in Brighton on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and a third was spotted the next day at Sussex University. A further two were reported from various parts of Beachy Head on the 5<sup>th</sup>, one in the hand whilst being ringed,

and another was found at Wick Bottom near Ovingdean. Another Great White Egret was at Weir Wood Reservoir from the 6<sup>th</sup>, but a more exotic bird, though sadly not tickable, was a Jungle Mynah seen in Seaford on the 9<sup>th</sup>. On the 10<sup>th</sup> a juvenile Dotterel flew west over Hope Gap, when

### three Firecrests in Hove were a fantastic garden tick

three Firecrests in Hove were a fantastic garden tick for a lucky observer. On the 11<sup>th</sup> a third Great White Egret was seen at Rye Harbour along with a Caspian Gull, but a leucistic House Martin at Devil's Dyke on the same date was surely the rarer sighting!

On the subject of House Martins, a large movement at Beachy Head on the 13<sup>th</sup> was an impressive sight, whilst further west at the Cuckmere yet another Wryneck was discovered. A very dark Marsh Harrier at Burpham on the 15<sup>th</sup> was notable as it was a wing tagged bird, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> a Great White Egret was finally clinched at Bewl Water, having been the subject of second guessing by the observer a few days earlier. Still another Wryneck was belatedly reported in Lancing on the 13<sup>th</sup>, though it was not a publicly viewable bird.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> another, or perhaps the same Wryneck was seen briefly in flight at Wick Bottom, and the next day a Lapland Bunting was heard over Shooters Bottom. A leucistic Grey Heron at Crawley Down Pond had apparently been present all summer, causing ID headaches between it and the Great White Egret that had been seen intermittently at Bewl Water. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> a lucky observer had a Grasshopper Warbler visit his garden - if only we were all so fortunate! On the 25<sup>th</sup> a rarer warbler was found at Seaford Head, a Barred Warbler. Though not as showy as a bird in Norfolk around the same time, it did get



Cattle Egret (Sandra Palme)

seen quite well by a few observers and was refound a few days later. Four Spoonbills in flight at Rye on 27<sup>th</sup> continued the reserve's good run of scarce birds. Another one joined them later and it was noted that one was colour-ringed. This was followed by a probable Little Bunting at the reserve the next day! At the other end of the county, Pagham Harbour had a Cattle Egret on the 28<sup>th</sup>, and a Woodlark singing at Broadwater Warren two days later was quite unseasonable.

## October

October came as quite a contrast to the previous month, as the weather became unsettled and wet by the 3<sup>rd</sup> and remained so through the majority of the month, interspersed with only short periods of drier weather. With winds frequently from the south, this was another month with well above average temperatures, and it was notably warm on the 31<sup>st</sup>.



Grey Phalarope (Sandra Palme)

The first sighting of interest was not a rarity but a Norwegian ringed Black-headed Gull at Arundel on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1231 km from its place of ringing and the first time it had been recorded outside Norway. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> a Hobby was seen at Golden Cross, a relatively late bird. Furthering the ringed birds theme, two interesting colour ringed birds were found in the west of the county on the 5<sup>th</sup>, a presumed first winter Caspian Gull

### a few lucky observers had a Honey-buzzard glide over

on the Adur (ringed in Germany) and a Spoonbill at Pagham Harbour. On the 6<sup>th</sup> a leucistic Chaffinch was found in a garden near Northiam, and the next day a Tawny Pipit was reported at Newhaven Tidemills. It was refound there on the 10<sup>th</sup> and showed well to many appreciative birders, unusually for a large pipit. Whilst watching it a few lucky observers also had a Honey-buzzard glide over,

eventually heading west. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, during a national Golden Plover survey, a juvenile American Golden Plover was found at Scotney Gravel Pits, though it was mobile and elusive for its very short stay. On the 13<sup>th</sup> two Grey Phalaropes were found at Pulborough Brooks, sadly far more distant than the very obliging bird at Hove earlier in the year! On the same day the first of many Yellow-browed Warblers was found at Northcommon Farm, Selsey, and a Snow Bunting at Pett Level the next day had apparently been around for a few days previously.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> a Great Grey Shrike was found at Littlehampton golf course, and the next day a very late White-winged Black Tern was reported at Rye, the first day of an exceptionally long stay, presumably due to the fact that it was in heavy moult. A Stone-curlew at Climping the next day was also rather late, and the same observer found a Yellow-browed Warbler at the same location. Another 'YBW' was reported at Hope Gap, also on 18<sup>th</sup>, along with yet another elusive Barred Warbler. On the 20<sup>th</sup> one, or possibly two Yellow-browed Warblers were at Belle Tout. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, further up the road at Beachy Head's old trapping area, another long staying rarity was discovered, a beautiful summer plumaged male Red-breasted Flycatcher which showed well to many observers. Another Great Grey Shrike was found at Iping Common on the 27<sup>th</sup>, though it became quite mobile. The next day a Pallas's Warbler was discovered at Church Norton, whilst a Little Bunting showed briefly to those enjoying the flycatcher at Beachy Head. On the 30<sup>th</sup> a Snow Bunting was present at Bexhill



Pallas's Warbler (Sandra Palme)

*Please note that inclusion in 'Recent Sightings' does not imply that a record has been confirmed, accepted, or even submitted. Records should still be sent to the Recorder in the usual way.*

# Out and About

## Outings Report, August to November 2014 by Mark Wright

**The mid-week walk on the 28<sup>th</sup> August led by Chris Janman** was notable in being the first to venture to the new Medmerry reserve, and for answering the question: how many SOS members can fit into a car? (answer: 18 into five cars). I should mention that with ongoing car access improvements the 2015 outing should not require such a squeeze! Chris was able to point out the site on Earnley Flood Pools where Black-winged Stilts had famously bred this summer. A highlight along the way was a good sized flock of 25+ Yellow Wagtails feeding in the fields together with several Wheatears, and other birds seen were Yellowhammer, Whitethroat and many Sand Martins passing through. Waders though were in short supply but a summer-plumaged Little Grebe was some compensation. During lunch on the beach two Sandwich Terns were seen flying west and a total of six Common Terns flew off towards the Isle of Wight. Out in the middle of the reserve were hundreds of Canada Geese, two Common Buzzards and two Kestrels, and at least two Greenshanks and a Common Sandpiper were also seen. On the return as many as six Whinchats put in an appearance (also two Roe Deer and a Clouded Yellow butterfly). Back at Sidlesham, there were five Avocets and a Green Sandpiper on the Ferry Pool.

**Seven members joined Barry Collins for a walk around Thorney Island on the 30<sup>th</sup> August.** As with the mid-week walk a couple of days before there was a strong westerly wind. The best bird of the day was Osprey, with two roosting together on the mudflats off the

**The best bird of the day was Osprey, with two roosting together**

south-west corner of the island before flying to the east side of the Great Deep on a rising tide where they remained throughout the high tide period. Other highlights included three

Kingfishers, five Wheatears, four Whinchats, Lesser Whitethroat, three Blackcaps, seven Whitethroats, an adult Yellow-legged Gull, two Eiders and nine summering Brent Geese. Fourteen species of wader were seen including Green and Common Sandpipers, several Whimbrels, three Knots, 100+ Grey Plovers, 20 Ringed Plovers and 10 Greenshanks. In total the outing's avian species count reached an impressive 63, and other goodies included 15 Harbour Seals hauled up on the mudflats and six Clouded Yellow butterflies in a nearby lucerne field.

**Seventeen members gathered at Pagham Harbour Information Centre on the 7<sup>th</sup> September** to join Bernie Forbes, Dave Smith and Dorian Mason for a walk down to Church Norton. Good numbers of Greenfinches and Goldfinches were in the trees around the car park together with a couple of Spotted Flycatchers. On the Ferry were four Avocets, five Green Sandpipers and a skulking juvenile Little Stint amongst the flock of Black-tailed Godwits, and an eclipse Shoveler was noted amongst the Teal. Three Bar-tailed Godwits flew over into the harbour and a Kingfisher sped over the Ferry to the stream at the back.

**a Kingfisher sped over the Ferry to the stream at the back.**

On the walk down the west side by the Long Pool migrants included Whitethroat, Sedge and Reed Warbler, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler, whilst a Water Rail squealed from the cover of the reed bed. Out in the harbour a roosting flock of Redshanks included a lone Greenshank and a juvenile Curlew Sandpiper, and on the high tide there were a good number of Wigeon and lesser numbers of Teal. Five Whinchats were noted plus a couple of Wheatears in the fields, whilst the hedgerow at the back of the hide at Church Norton provided sightings of Whitethroat, Blackcap, Garden Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher. Other sightings included five Whimbrels (three of which flew close by), Knot, nine Sandwich Terns, a couple of Mediterranean Gulls and five Little Terns briefly seen fishing before rapidly departing west along the shore. Yet another Kingfisher appeared to entertain the group, and on the return walk good views of Common Buzzard, Red-legged and Grey Partridge were had and a high-flying, small raptor zipped past,



eventually identified as a male Merlin. Yellow Wagtails were heard, and a few were seen feeding on the ground around the cattle at the back of the Ferry.

**The midweek walk at Pett Level on 16 September** led by Chris Barfield attracted 15 members, some new to this site. A Raven croning overhead was a good omen, and the walk up the canalside revealed a few straggling migrants – Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Reed Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat, plus resident Cetti's Warbler. Swallows and House Martins were drifting west, and we saw Sand Martins over the pools later. Then

**another raptor came fast into view, this time a Hobby, giving us superb views**

the fun began as both Kestrel and Sparrowhawk were picked up soaring over the trees, (a good opportunity to tell these two apart, although the leader did have problems with this!), and a Peregrine was spotted sitting on a distant fencepost. We had only

just taken our eyes off these when another raptor came fast into view, this time a Hobby, giving us superb views as it passed overhead, and a Buzzard put in an appearance soon after. The walk back across the fields produced a few Wheatears, but the final stretch along the sea wall back to the cars was probably the most rewarding, with wildfowl and grebes on the pools and a good variety of waders and gulls on the beach - plus our sixth raptor, a juvenile Marsh Harrier. The morning's total was a very respectable 62 species.

**With a forecast of bad weather and prior notice that the ringing station would be closed as a consequence,** it was not surprising that only two people turned up on 8<sup>th</sup> October to join David Jode for the joint half day walk with the Eastbourne RSPB group. In fact there was a two hour respite from the rain and most of the southwesterly was avoided by staying east of the ringing station. Fifteen species was a good tally under these inclement conditions and included six Little Egrets and two Herons sheltering in the undercliff vegetation at Holywell, joined by a probable Common Buzzard and a handful of Swallows moving SW along the cliff edge.

**We found a window in the weather for our walk around Cissbury Ring on the 12<sup>th</sup> October** and as everyone (13 in total) gathered to join me on the walk we had already seen several Skylarks, a solitary west-flying Stock Dove, Woodpigeons heading in various directions, two charms of Goldfinch, a small number of House Martins heading south (with many more later) and a female Kestrel that finally and obligingly descended slowly to perch on a car park fence post (we eventually saw another two at least). To contrast with the sharp wing outline of the falcon a broad-winged Sparrowhawk appeared overhead, until seen

**we suddenly found three or four Stonechats and a Whinchat perched in front of us**

off by a Carrion Crow when we were half way up the track. By the time we entered the Ring we had seen Swallow, Jay, Blackcap, Pied Wagtail, Green Woodpecker, Linnet, Starling and Herring Gull.

Pausing at the top of the Ring we soon picked up Meadow Pipit and two Mistle Thrushes until distracted unexpectedly by the sighting of a skein of distant Brent Geese heading we thought for Pagham Harbour.

Returning our gaze to the gorse around us we suddenly found three or four Stonechats and a Whinchat perched in front of us. Pursuing these optically brought forth a call of “...long tail, a Dartford Warbler?” and sure enough it wasn’t long before all of us enjoyed views as it flew between gorse bushes. Later some of us were beginning to exchange hopeful glances about some dark thrushes seen distantly in the usual yews. One of the two birders watching came across confirming our hopes and a few minutes later we too all had views of two male Ring Ouzels, with a Chiffchaff there too. Eventually dragging everyone away we returned outside the south side of the Ring where we found quite a party of Long-tailed Tits and eventually a Buzzard to add to our morning’s collection of around 32 species.

**Perhaps unexpectedly for a mid-October walk** targeted on migrants, the walk at Beachy Head on the 18<sup>th</sup> started with sightings of Gannets distantly plunge-diving, bright white in the sun, perhaps brought

closer to the coast by the south-south-westerly, and two fly-past small groups of Oystercatchers heading east. There were also one, probably two Ravens prospecting on the cliffs. Thereafter as the thirteen of us walked in the direction of Horseshoe Plantation, the sightings were

## then the first Ring Ouzel was spotted - a female in full view

more expected and included Stonechats, Goldfinches in small and large charms, Jackdaws (in large flocks), Skylarks (15 or so), Meadow Pipits (around 5), occasional Swallows heading east in small groups, and a distant Buzzard. Horseshoe Plantation added Blue and Great Tit,

Chiffchaff, Chaffinch and a couple of Great Spotted Woodpeckers. The walk east from Belle Tout was relatively quiet bar corvids (Crow and Magpie), Herring Gull and a Kestrel. Shooters Bottom also appeared quiet with only an occasional Robin, but then the first Ring Ouzel was spotted - a female in full view eating hawthorn berries, soon joined by others, including at least one male with resplendent white gorget. Eventually our count reached a probable eight as we turned to head back. And then almost immediately a dog put up a Short-eared Owl that was promptly harassed by a crow, and we had good views as it headed over the road before dropping down to the ground (apparently there were two). Thanks to all for the good company - my species count was 23 for our walk.

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## The 2015 Outings Programme

**A**s the days get ever shorter, the temperatures get ever lower and staying indoors in front of a fire may seem preferable, I hope that the Outings Programme (enclosed with this posting) will provide good reasons to get outside again – birdwatching in Sussex can be enjoyable all year! Here are some pointers.

To get the new year's bird list off to a good start in January, Chris Bentley will be leading us around **Rye Harbour**, and further afield Neil Greenaway will be taking us in search of Thames estuary waders and raptors on the **Isle of Sheppey** (given that in the past we have pushed

our way through blizzards here it may be as well to check the forecast and website beforehand!). As well as the familiar favourites in 2015, such as **Rackham Woods, The Burgh, Old Lodge & Ashdown Forest, Pagham Spit & North Wall** and **Dungeness**, we have outings to locations that have not featured in the programme before, including **West Rise Marsh** and the new **RSPB Medmerry reserve** (famous for this year's breeding Black-winged Stilts). There are also outings to locations that do not feature every year, including **Newhaven Tidemills, Knepp Estate** and **Arlington Reservoir**. Of course there are the traditional seawatches at **Selsey** and **Splash Point** to brush up your skills at this more tricky branch of birding, and visits to **Lavington Common** and **Ashdown Forest** to experience the special birds which come out only at dusk.

We believe that all our outings are family friendly, and in recent years the importance of connecting children with nature has become widely recognised. I would like to highlight outings that we think might be of particular interest to families whilst appealing to all. These include **Warnham LNR** on 29<sup>th</sup> March, **Pulborough RSPB** on 18<sup>th</sup> April, and two joint events with the Sussex Wildlife Trust at Rye Harbour which are particularly children orientated - **Family pond dipping and birdwatching at Castle Water** on 27<sup>th</sup> June and **Birds, Bugs and Bats** on 23<sup>rd</sup> August. Finally there are at least five outings that I believe are accessible by public transport, and these include **Arlington Reservoir** (30<sup>th</sup> August), **RSPB Pagham Harbour** (5<sup>th</sup> September), **Whitbread Hollow & Beachy Head** (19<sup>th</sup> September), **Cissbury Ring** (11<sup>th</sup> October), and **Birling Gap & Shooters Bottom** (17<sup>th</sup> October). The usual caveats apply and anybody intending to use public transport is advised to check with the transport company closer to the time. We would be pleased to take note of any comments.

Finally I would like to take the opportunity to thank those who gave up their time to 'get us onto' birds this year and will give up their time next year. As ever we would welcome feedback and any ideas or requests for outings and we can easily be reached via [outings@sos.org.uk](mailto:outings@sos.org.uk).

**Mark Wright, Outings Organiser**

## Weekend Tide Times

December					
13	03.07	15.25	14	03.55	16.16
20	09.39	22.05	21	10.25	22.51
27	02.41	15.03	28	03.35	16.00
January					
3	09.50	22.16	4	10.34	22.59
10	01.59	14.13	11	02.36	14.50
17	08.12	20.46	18	09.12	21.43
24	01.56	13.56	25	02.22	14.44
February					
			1	09.34	22.01
7	01.11	13.13	8	01.32	13.45
14	06.17	19.00	15	07.37	20.18
21	00.33	12.53	22	01.17	13.37
28	06.57	19.42			
March					
			1	08.14	20.50
7	00.02	12.16	8	00.33	12.47
14	04.30	17.07	15	05.44	18.30
21	11.49		22	00.11	12.32

Times are for Shoreham Harbour, but are only a few minutes different across the whole county. Copyright and/or database rights, reproduced by permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the UK Hydrographic Office ([www.ukho.gov.uk](http://www.ukho.gov.uk)).

Disclaimer: Times shown are believed to be as accurate as possible but are not for navigational use and no responsibility can be accepted by the editor or the SOS for any injury or loss incurred in their use. Software provided by Belfield Software ([www.tideplotter.co.uk](http://www.tideplotter.co.uk))

## Midweek Walks

**Thurs 22nd January: Pett Level & Winchelsea Beach.** Meet at 10.00am in layby just W of Pett Pools (TQ899143). Short walk along sea wall then moving on to Winchelsea Beach. Total about 3 miles, finish about 1.30. Leader: Chris Barfield

**Tuesday 24th February: Selsey area.** Meet at 09.30am in the sea-front car park at the southern end of B2145 (197/SZ851923). We will visit a couple of sites on the peninsular during the day. Bring lunch. Leader: Bernie Forbes.

**Wednesday 18th March: Dungeness area.** Meet at Old Light-house car park at 9.30am. (189/TR088168). All day, bring lunch and RSPB membership card. Will start with short sea watch before moving onto RSPB reserve. Leader: Richard Lowe.

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Copy date for the next issue:  
10 February



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