

## Vale of White Horse Local Group

A Happy New Year from the committee to everyone in the Vale of White Horse local group.

### Long Service Award

First of all many congratulations to our local group member, Margaret Meardon, for 40 years of volunteering with the RSPB. Here she is receiving her golden eagle long service award on 9 November 2017 at RSPB Midlands, Banbury.



### Forthcoming Events

The first indoor meeting of this year is on 15 January when Jim Almond will be talking about his 'Big Year', attempting to see the maximum possible number of birds in his travels around the UK in 2014.

### Photo Competition

Entries for our annual wildlife photo competition need to be brought to the next meeting on 19 Feb. You can enter up to three prints of birds or other wildlife, no larger than 7" x 5". Please put your name, address and the species name on the back of the print mount. Pictures will be displayed at the March meeting when the winners will be announced.

### Forthcoming Events

On 19 Feb our chairman Steve Bastow presents an account of his recent bird sightings in southern Spain.

Please bring some cakes for the cake stall that evening too.



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On 19 March Dominic Couzens (who writes for Nature's Home) describes the lives of birds in 'Birds Behaving Badly', and will judge the photo competition.

### Car Excursions

There are two car trips planned: the first on 24 February to Greenham Common for heathland birds (meet there at 9 am). Woodlark are resident at Greenham.



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The next trip on 24 Mar is to the great bustard reintroduction project on Salisbury Plain (meet on site at 9:15 a.m.).



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Full arrangements will be announced nearer the time. Car sharing can be organised. Contact Martin Latham ([martinj.latham@googlemail.com](mailto:martinj.latham@googlemail.com)) or 01235 851918.

### Weekend Away

A local group weekend away in Pembrokeshire is planned for 6-8 April. Contact Steve Cload ([stephencload409@btinternet.com](mailto:stephencload409@btinternet.com))

### Big Garden Birdwatch

Garden birdwatch takes place 27-29 January 2018

Last year's Oxfordshire top ten were house sparrow (retaining its top spot), blackbird, starling, wood pigeon, blue tit, goldfinch, robin, long tailed tit, great tit, collared dove. Chaffinch and blue tit sightings were down on last year, in line with the national trend.



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Last year's prolonged wet spell meant there were fewer caterpillars about for feeding their young. It's likely that this led to fewer younger birds surviving.

## Review of Autumn Field Trips

### Middleton Lakes (RSPB)

The September trip was attended by 18 people from the Oxford group and five from the Vale of White Horse. We recorded 66 species, including great white egret, little egret, black swan, wigeon, shoveler, hobby, water rail, green sandpiper, yellow wagtail, Cetti's warbler, stonechat and raven.



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### Pulborough Brooks (RSPB)

The October trip was attended by 21 people, including three from the Vale. The pickup near McDonalds went smoothly, but the problem is that there is nowhere nearby to leave cars for the day. This means that anyone wishing to board the coach there needs a willing helper or taxi to drop them off. Alternative arrangements are being sought.

All in all though, we had a pretty good day. Perhaps the most exciting moments were spent watching the antics of a peregrine. This was a young bird practising its flying skills. After some most impressive stoops and swoops it drove a carrion crow off the marsh. It then decided to harry a marsh harrier. Not content with that, it picked a scrap with a buzzard.

We also saw hobby, ruff, black-tailed godwit, snipe, wigeon, pintail, shoveler, Egyptian goose and redpoll. The star bird was undoubtedly a great grey shrike, but frustratingly it eluded the members from the Vale.

Our combined score was 63 species. Here is a picture of the one that got away, for next time.



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## Rutland Water

The visit to Rutland Water in November was attended by 31 people including 10 from the Vale. The weather was kind to us and we managed to find at least 67 species. The star bird was undoubtedly a splendid drake American wigeon.

It was very active and took a bit of finding among the masses of wigeon and coot, but was well worth the effort. Other interesting birds included great white egret, red-crested pochard, pintail, goldeneye, water rail, marsh harrier, red-necked grebe and ringed plover.

Thanks to Martin Latham for the field trip reports.

## Review of Autumn Indoor Meetings

In September we heard about the secrets of the Forest of Dean from Nick Martin in an interesting and well-received presentation with fine photographs. The former hunting forest is home to goshawk, maybe ancient falconers' escapes, and other species we would hope to see like adders, willow tits, brambling and pied flycatcher. Wild boar were released in 1998, perhaps accidentally. Pine martens might be introduced in the hope of predated grey squirrel.



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In October we had a whistle stop photographic tour of the British Isles by Ashley Grove: from Shetland skuas and wrens with their own 'dialect' song, to Cairngorm black grouse, and Norfolk avocets. He gave useful hints like how to construct feeding stations to entice birds, and advised lying flat on one's belly to photographing wildfowl, using a large telephoto lens.

In November, yet more excellent photographs from Oliver Smart, who also talked on the science of

birds: how different species are adapted to their ecological niches by behaviour, design of feathers, bills, camouflage, adaptations and so on. Lots of amazing facts: wheatears eject pellets like owls and he had a photo showing this; tubenoses on fulmars are to excrete salt, crossbills can have right- or left-handed bills, some raptors have a bony ridge above their eye like a sun visor.

The December meeting took us to a tropical paradise with Steve Holiday ..... then everybody enjoyed some mince pies. Someone won the Quiz.

## Meeting Refreshments

Another request for volunteers to help with tea and coffee at meetings. Thank you to those who have already signed up on the rota.

## Back from the Brink

'Back from the Brink' is a new national conservation project funded, among others, by the Heritage lottery fund and supported by RSPB, Natural England and many other conservation organizations. Its ambition is to save twenty threatened species from extinction and benefit over 200 more through nineteen projects that span England. Some of the target species are willow tit, black-tailed godwit, ladybird spider, pine marten, grey long eared bat, shrill carder bee and little whirlpool ramshorn snail.

More information can be found on their website [naturebftb.co.uk](http://naturebftb.co.uk) and blog, currently under development.



Black tailed godwits in flight .© Chris Gomersall rspb-images.com

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