

Vale of White Horse Local Group

Happy New Year to everyone from your local group committee.

Editorial

People enjoy birdwatching in different ways. Some watch garden birds on their feeders, delighting in a sudden visit from a great spotted woodpecker, or noting changes: where are the collared doves this year? Some visit foreign countries chasing new species for their life lists, even undertaking 'Big Year' trips. Some think of birds as just one part of an ecosystem and study seasonal variations in plant and animal species within their local area or beyond. Some like trips to reserves around the country; there are 574 bird species on the British list, so there's always a chance of seeing something new.



A rare grey phalarope visited Farmoor reservoir this winter.

(Mike Langman rspb-images.com)

Others lead wildlife walks, contribute to blogs, help grandchildren observe the difference between a coot and a moorhen at the park, or photograph birds, from egrets to sunbirds.

The RSPB and its local groups have something to offer everyone, and in recent years has started to talk more about it's work for birds, other species and habitats, as shown by the new title of Nature's Home for the quarterly magazine.

Here in the Vale of White Horse,

we look forward, as usual, to talks about wildlife, and to trips near and far.

First some reminders of what's on:

Photographic Competition

Entries for our wildlife photo competition need to be brought to the 15 February indoor meeting or to Pat Phillips 01491 839948. You can enter up to three prints of birds or other wildlife, no larger than 7"x 5"; please put your name and address and the species name on the back of the print mount. Entrants who would like their image considered for the calendar will need to supply a JPG file on request. The entry fee is £2. Pictures will be displayed at the March meeting when the winners will be announced.

Big Garden Birdwatch

The next Big Garden Birdwatch takes place over the weekend 30-31 January this year. Last year's results for Oxfordshire were (in order of frequency of records) house sparrow, blackbird, blue tit, starling, woodpigeon, goldfinch, robin, chaffinch, great tit, collared dove, dunnock, long-tailed tit, jackdaw, magpie, carrion crow, greenfinch, feral pigeon, red kite, coal tit, wren. How will this year compare?



Red kites now common in Oxfordshire Ben Hall (rspb-images.com)

Local Birding

Thinking of a countryside walk? Look for up-to-date news of sightings at our local birding hotspots, RSPB Otmoor, Farmoor, Radley and elsewhere at <http://oxonbirding.blogspot.co.uk/>

Indoor Meetings coming up this season

In January, Steve Magennis ARPS returns for a third visit to give hints on 'Successful Wildlife Photography'. He has ten years' experience as a wildlife photographer and more recently photographs working dogs in action.

In February, Peter Holden MBE speaks on 'The RSPB's Natural Secrets' which looks at the ways birds and other wildlife benefit from the work of the RSPB. Peter has written nine books, including the bestselling 'RSPB Handbook of British Birds' and the acclaimed 'RSPB Handbook of Garden Wildlife'. He worked for the RSPB for more than 40 years, and introduced the 'Big Garden Birdwatch' in 1969. It was the first citizen science project in the UK. In March, Mike Wilkes returns to give his talk on 'Birds of Southern Texas'. A fascinating area for wildlife, Texas has pre-eminence as a bird-watching area due to being on major migratory paths. That evening also features the results of the photo competition.

Outdoor Events

Trips in January, February and March:

On 17 January there is a car outing (own cars) to Blashford Lakes and Blackwater Arboretum.

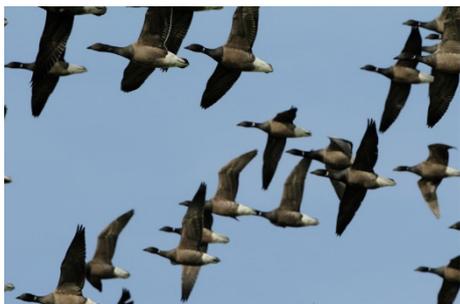
Blashford Lakes, former gravel pits surrounded by grassland and willow, birch and alder woodland, attracts thousands of wildfowl in winter as well as bittern and good numbers of woodland birds including redpoll, siskin and brambling. Wildlife watching is easy with access to six accessible bird hides and a number of "viewing screens" around the site. Meet at 10 am at Blashford Lakes. Contact Steve Cload for details.



*Siskin and greenfinch on garden feeder
Chris Gomersall (rspb-images.com)*

On 21 February there is a coach outing to RSPB Cliffe Pools with the Oxford Local Group. The reserve is on the North Kent marshes on the Thames estuary and attracts spectacular numbers of wintering waders. There are six viewing points overlooking fresh pools and saline lagoons and a variety of level trails. The outing needs to be booked in advance at a Monday meeting. Please bring cash with you to pay on the coach which leaves Didcot at 7 am (cost depends on the number of participants).

On 20 March there is another car outing to Farlington Marshes beside the Solent in Hampshire: a species-rich grazing marsh of international importance for waders and wildfowl; meet there at 10 am.



*Brent geese are regularly seen at Farlington Marshes in winter
Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)*

Weekend Away

In March, another local group weekend away is being planned by Steve Cload who will announce venue and details nearer the time.

Review of Autumn Meetings and Outings

The season started with an entertaining talk in September on why the dodo and great auk went extinct: "Extinct Birds" by Dr Pat Morris, Royal Holloway College and President of the Hedgehog Society. The lack of diversity in island populations is an environmental concern still, and reminds us of the need for nature reserves to be linked rather than isolated.

October's talk was "Costa Rica, Central America's Best Kept Secret" by Steve Lovell, a landscape gardener who works for the RSPB. The varied habitats and species including morphos, quetzals and howlers were described with many fine photographs. The wildlife in Costa Rica enjoys official protection as the volcanic island with its cloud forests is an ecotourist destination. In November, Richard Pople showed stunning colourful bird photos from his 2012 visit to Ethiopia, interspersed with local street scenes. There are 262 bird species!

The December members' evening featured, as always, mince pies and talks by group members. This year, chairman Steve Bastow updated us on RSPB projects, Steve Cload showed us great photos of Indian birds, David and Christine Marshall described their '@Birding Travels to Finland' and Mike Taylor talked about 'Day Flying Moths'.

Review of Outings

Autumn outings were to Arne in Dorset, Titchfield Haven in Hampshire, Pulborough Brooks in Sussex and nearer home, to Thatcham Nature Centre near Newbury. We would encourage more people to go on these outings as interesting species are always spotted with the help of the more experienced birdwatchers

with scopes to help. For example wood sandpiper, bearded tit, greenshank and kingfisher were seen at Titchfield Haven.

Fundraising for the RSPB

This year, our local group was able to donate £2155.08 to the RSPB. Thank you all for supporting our fund raising efforts.

Volunteers for Tea Duty

Another request for volunteers to help with tea and coffee at meetings. Thank you to those who have already signed up on the rota for 2016.

Conservation in the News (in brief)

The 'Nature of Climate Change' published by the RSPB November 2015, reviews and compiles the existing evidence and shows that some of Europe's best-loved wildlife, from birds to bees, is already at risk from a changing climate and this will increase over coming decades. Martin Harper, RSPB's Director of Conservation, said: "Climate change is the greatest long-term threat to people and wildlife. We are already seeing its impacts and, alongside other pressures on land and at sea, our wildlife is increasingly at risk."

Nature for Health

NHS should spend millions on nature-for-health plan, say wildlife groups. This proposal is part of a wider plan put forward by the RSPB, National Trust and 24 other groups on how the government should protect and restore UK flora and fauna. NHS England should spend millions of pounds on using nature to prevent illness and help people recover from health problems, according to a coalition of wildlife groups representing millions of people.



*Steve Cload second place
photographic competition 2015*