

## Vale of White Horse Local Group

Welcome to the new season of the Vale of White Horse Local Group, with a special welcome to any new members.

We hope you will enjoy the various activities organized for 2016-17 which are detailed in the programme accompanying this newsletter.



*A summer sight: hobby hunting for dragonflies  
Ben Andrew rspb-images.com*

### Anniversary

The fortieth anniversary of the founding of our Local Group occurs in 2017 and we plan to celebrate at the April meeting when Peter Holden MBE will be speaking on the work of the RSPB 'Giving Nature a Home'.

Any reminiscences from members about the Group's early years, or personalities, or events or meetings would be greatly welcomed and will be published in a future newsletter: contact me at a meeting or by email

fmjenkins@hotmail.co.uk

### New Season

The new programme has the usual mix of Monday evening talks on a variety of wildlife-related topics and weekend outings by coach or car. There is a plant sale, a photographic competition for members, and a regular raffle.

### Outdoor Events

We would encourage everyone to support the outings; there are always interesting birds to be seen in a variety of habitats, with experienced people helping with identification, and it is a chance to visit nature reserves which may be unfamiliar. The cost depends on how many people come, and the outings need to be booked in advance at an evening meeting.

Please note that the first outdoor event on 18 September, a coach trip to Pagham Harbour in Sussex, is scheduled before the first indoor meeting on Monday 19 September. There should be autumn migrants galore. If you would like to go on this trip contact Group Leader Steve Bastow 07900213698 or

stevebastow@btinternet.com

### Meetings this autumn

We have talks by both familiar visitors to the Group and new speakers on the birds of Norfolk, birds of Papua New Guinea and Northern Australia, the mysteries of migration, and photography in Finland. All talks will include superb photographs.

There are outings to Hampshire to Farlington Marshes and to Blashford Lakes (which has an education centre) and Stanpit Marsh and to Otmoor.



*View of Otmoor our local RSPB reserve  
Ben Hall rspb-images.com*

Here is a report by Jane Rudd on the members' weekend away

### RSPB Mini Break 2016

On 1 April sixteen group members set off for a weekend break in Morecambe, Lancs. We broke the journey on the way north by visiting the RSPB reserve of Coombes Valley, Staffs. This is a steep sided wooded valley with the Coombes Brook running at the bottom. A good area to see a dipper, but we did not catch sight of any. The birds were sparse, but a willow tit was seen. A peregrine was spotted on the edge of the Peak District National Park. It was perched on a cliff face and was thought to be nesting in the area.

Leighton Moss was visited the next day. A good number of species were seen in spite of it being a wet day. Notable birds were redpoll, black tailed godwits, marsh harrier, avocets, merlin, sand martin and red breasted merganser. No bittern was seen or heard.

On the way home a morning stop was made at the RSPB reserve of Burton Mere Wetlands on the Dee estuary.



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

Here there was quite a large flock of black tailed godwits, some beginning to get their summer plumage, and a good number of

avocets. A swallow was seen along with a water pipit and a skylark singing high in the sky.

A raven was observed by the furthest hide.



*Raven by Chris Gomersall rspb-images.com*

This was a very enjoyable weekend with good accommodation and thanks are extended to Pat Phillips and Steve Cload for organising it.

### **Weekend Away**

Another ever-popular members' Spring weekend away is planned.

### **News from the AGM**

The membership of the VWH Group is one of the highest in the Midlands region and with an average of over 70 members typically attending there is a vibrant social atmosphere at meetings and a sustainable outdoor events programme with the support of the Oxford Local Group. Having said this, membership, as in other local societies, is somewhat in decline, and keeping going depends heavily on the support of many volunteers.

There are currently two vacancies for committee members: we are urgently seeking a programme secretary and an outdoor events organizer.

We are still short of volunteers to help with tea and coffee at meetings. Thank you to the few stalwarts who have already signed up on the rota. We will not be able to continue with refreshments unless more people can help.

### **Recent meetings and outings**

Ngorongoro Crater and Ndutu were the subjects of the presentation by Nigel Glover-Wright in April. Stunning photography of cheetahs in the rain and close ups of zebras, whose patterns are as individual as our fingerprints, were

memorable. The narration tended to be too anthropomorphic; many of our members have visited the area and more discussion of ecology would have been welcome. The plant sale raised £31.

Voyage to the South Atlantic by Oliver Smart in May was another well-illustrated talk featuring lots of penguins, always a crowd-pleaser! The voyage was from Argentina to South Georgia and Elephant Island. Of particular interest were hints on photographic techniques.

There was a trip to Linky Down in the Chilterns in April; unfortunately, the weather was poor and so was the attendance, but the target species of ring ouzel were spotted. For Durlston and Studland in Dorset in April, the weather was fine and sightings of Dartford warbler, rock pipit, fulmar and other seabirds, raven, a great northern diver at sea and firecrest were enjoyed.



*Firecrest Mike Langman rspb-images.com*

The May walk in the Wyre Forest had pied flycatcher, dipper, grey wagtail, a wood warbler during the picnic lunch stop, and excellent ice cream at the end.

On a June evening at Snelsmore Common a group of eleven members saw lots of roding woodcock but neither sight nor sound of nightjars.

Thanks to Gill Riches for the field trip reports.

### **Conservation News from the RSPB**

Dr Mark Eaton, a principal conservation scientist, reports on the latest birds added to the recent 'Red List' of conservation concern ([rspb.org.uk](http://rspb.org.uk))

New additions to the red list include birds from all habitats: upland species such as curlew, dotterel and whinchat; seabirds: puffin, kittiwake and shag,

farmland birds: turtle dove, cuckoo; and woodland birds including woodcock, nightingale, wood warbler and pied flycatcher. We have about a quarter of the world's curlews breeding in the UK and we know that they are doing badly elsewhere as well. So there is real international concern for curlew. And in global terms puffin, kittiwake and shag are amongst the UK's most important birdlife. Wryneck have been lost as breeding birds, they were once very widespread, breeding in 54 UK counties in the 19th century. If you look in the RSPB magazine back in 1908 we were selling nest boxes suitable for wrynecks to be put in gardens.

A number of our garden birds like house sparrows, starlings and song thrushes have been on the red list for a while; this time around we see the addition of mistle thrushes. Mark explains what we can do to help. 'The first step is considering what to do in your own outdoor spaces to create better habitats for wildlife. Those who have a garden could consider wildlife friendly gardening - create a pond, plant pollen rich flowers, or plant shrubs with berries for birds'. There is cause for hope, as the review demonstrates that conservation can work if properly targeted and funded: bittern and nightjar, have moved from Red to Amber thanks to the creation and management of suitable habitat, stimulated by species action plans. RSPB Otmoor is a conservation hotspot in the Midlands area of national importance. We have breeding lapwing, snipe, redshank, curlew, and many other species (see <http://otmoorbirding.blogspot.co.uk/p/systematic-bird-list.html>) Red kites have moved onto the green list. The very first red data book had a red kite on the cover because it was a perfect example of a threatened bird, hanging on in a just a few Welsh valleys, but now they're widespread, a common sight in many places.