



# a million voices for nature

The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment.

Nature is amazing - help us keep it that way.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076, Scotland no. SC037654.

Editor Brenda Ross

## NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2013

We are delighted to welcome our new Group Leader Steve Bastow. Here he tells us about himself.



### Steve Bastow

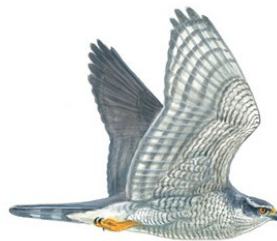
Just a few words from the new group leader. It seems only minutes ago that I spotted an opportunity to join the Vale of the White Horse (VWH) Local group. I was sitting at home on my PC looking for alternative careers when I spotted the opportunity on the RSPB website – Group Leader required. I checked off the requirements, organisational skills, leadership experience, interested in the environment and a member of the RSPB. Great, I thought. I prepared my CV then thought I might have missed something but I could not put my finger on it. Voluntary. Oh well you can't have everything!

Anyway that's how I come to be new group leader. I currently live in Witney with my family so I am slightly on the edge of the region. I have spent the majority of my career in medical sales and have for the last fifteen years managed medium size sales teams supplying various products to the NHS across the UK.

I have always enjoyed bird watching but although an active bird watcher, I

am far from an expert and the ability that some experienced birders have of distinguishing birds by their song has eluded me for many years. If I cannot see it clearly and it is not completely still I have little chance of naming it.

I joined the VWH local group for a number of reasons. It is a friendly group with an active committee and members programme. I believe there is the opportunity to increase the number of participating members in the group and become a more effective fundraising unit for the RSPB to support both local and national causes. I am keen to look at new ideas and take on board any suggestions for development of initiatives from our members. So it's now over to you. I can be contacted by email or phone (preferably email) and I would welcome any suggestions or ideas for developing members programmes or new participants supporting the existing committee.



### Future Meetings

In March Keith Offord will talk on how birds, from vast soaring eagles to minuscule hummingbirds, become airborne and travel with the minimum expenditure of energy. His talk will be illustrated with spectacular examples from around the world.

Also in March we display the results of

our annual photography competition. Which one of our frequent winners will win again or will we have a new winner?

In April Andy Clements BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) Chief Executive's talk is entitled 'Science to Capture the Public's Imagination'. He will talk about their migration research and update us on the pioneering work done by his excellent organisation.

April is also the meeting to bring and buy plants to benefit the RSPB

In May, the final talk of the year will be John Wyatt on the birds of ancient Egypt. Birds feature prominently in the decoration of Ancient Egyptian Temples and other buildings. This talk will explore their significance and relation with present day avifauna. This will be his fifth visit to our group, his last in 2007 talking on the birds of Costa Rica.

The May meeting is preceded by the AGM starting at 7.15pm.



### Outings

The group weekend away this year is in March to the New Forest. Places are all taken for this popular event this year. So if you are disappointed and interested in next year watch out for the details early next season.

Where do birds meet for coffee?  
In a nest-cafe.

In April we are visiting Cowlease Wood. This wood is set high in the Chiltern Hills with amazing views over the surrounding countryside. There is a great mix of habitats in this small wood and plenty of paths to explore. Meet at 10am in the car park.

Later in April we join our friends from the Oxford group to visit Durlston Country park in Dorset, a fabulous countryside paradise, consisting of sea-cliffs, coastal limestone downland, hay meadows, hedgerows and woodland.

May sees us visiting Paxton Pits in Cambridgeshire again by coach with the Oxford group. Paxton Pits is 75 hectares of lakes, meadow, grassland, scrub and woodland next to the river Great Ouse where you can enjoy a wealth of wildlife all year round.

Booking for the coach trips should be done at the indoor meetings.



### Severn Barrage

A Proposal to build a Barrage across the Severn Estuary 'could be absolutely devastating', environmental groups have told MPs.

The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT), National Trust, RSPB and Angling Trust told the House of Commons Energy & Climate Committee they all supported tidal energy development in the Severn, but that the current proposal lacked detail and claims that it would not unacceptably damage wildlife and large areas of habitat were "not realistic".

As well as doubting claims about the environmental impact of the barrage, all four organisations expressed support for future alternative smaller projects in the Severn Estuary to test and develop new tidal energy technology which Britain could export globally. Read more at [www.rspb.org.uk/news](http://www.rspb.org.uk/news).

### Baby Birds

It's common in spring and summer to find young birds sitting on the ground or hopping about without any sign of their parents.

This is perfectly normal, so there's no need to be worried. The parents are probably just away collecting food - or are hidden from view nearby, keeping a watchful eye.

'Fledglings should be left where they are, in the care of their parents.'

The young of most familiar garden birds fledge once they are fully feathered, but before they're able to fly, they spend a day or two on the ground while their feathers finish developing.

Tawny owl chicks are mobile at a very early age, and can be seen climbing in and around their nest tree before they are even half grown.

If you find a fledgling or young owl, the best thing to do is to leave it where it is.

### *What if the bird is in danger?*

Removal of a fledgling from the wild reduces its chances of long-term survival to a small fraction. Fledglings should be left where they are, in the care of their parents.

If the bird is on a busy path or road, or other potentially dangerous, exposed location, it makes sense to pick it up and move it a short distance to a safer place. Birds have a poor sense of smell so handling a young bird does not cause its parents to abandon it but make sure you leave it within hearing distance of where it was found.

Just because you cannot see the adult birds does not mean that they are not there. They will be in cover, close by, and will tend to the youngster once you move away. Only remove a fledgling as a very last resort if it is injured or has definitely been abandoned.

### *Can I put it back in its nest?*

If the young bird is unfeathered or covered in fluffy down (a nestling) and

has obviously fallen out of a nest by accident, it may be possible to put it back.

If this can't be done, the chick is dependent on humans for survival, and it should be passed on to an expert rehabilitator, such as a local vet.

All birds, their nest and eggs are protected by law to give birds the very best chance of long-term survival.



### Know Your Birds

#### Sand Martin

Sand martins are the smallest European hirundines (martins and swallows), with dark brown upper parts and dark under wings contrasting with otherwise pale under parts divided by a distinctive dark chest bar. Agile fliers, feeding mainly over water, they will perch on overhead wires or branches. They are gregarious in the breeding season and winter. Over the past 50 years the European population has crashed on two occasions as a result of drought in the birds' African wintering grounds. Found along rivers and other water bodies throughout the UK. Also found around man-made gravel pits where artificial nesting banks are sometimes provided.

They come to the UK in March and leave in October. They eat Invertebrates, taken on the wing.

UK population 85,000-270,000 nests.

Size: robin-sized or smaller

Feather colours: brown, white, cream/buff

Beak colours: black/dark grey

Beak length: short

Beak thickness: short

Leg colour: black/grey, brown

Behaviour: part of flock, catches insects in flight.

Similar birds - Swallow, House Martin.

Website: [www.rspb-vwh.org.uk](http://www.rspb-vwh.org.uk)