

The Birders' Bulletin #4 - from Croydon RSPB Group (Mid-June 2009)

1. Please note that these Field Trips with the Croydon RSPB Group are coming up soon:-

Tuesday, 16th June : Weir Wood Reservoir & Old Lodge Reserve, Ashdown Forest

(Meet at Weir Wood car park at 10:15 am. Check details with Terry or Linda Osborn - 8679 2405).

Waterfowl (probably including **Mandarin Duck** and **Great Crested Grebe**), **Common Terns** nesting on artificial rafts, **Grey Herons** still lingering around their breeding colony and a variety of warblers and other passerines can be expected at Weir Wood Reservoir before the party moves on to Ashdown Forest.

We may visit an area near the Forest Centre where **Dartford Warbler** can be seen, then the rest of the day will be taken up with a circuit of the Sussex Wildlife Trust's Old Lodge Reserve. The mixture of heathland, bog and conifers young and old at this site seems to act as a magnet for interesting birds which, at this season, usually include **Hobby**, **Cuckoo**, **Woodlark**, **Tree Pipit**, **Redstart** and **Lesser Redpoll** and there is also a fair chance of **Crossbill**. If the weather is good, dragonflies should also be plentiful.

Saturday, 20th June : Weir Wood Reservoir & Ashdown Forest

(An evening outing, meeting at Weir Wood car park at 6:00 pm. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475 - or Roger Tarran - 8660 2664).

Waterfowl (probably including **Mandarin Duck** and **Great Crested Grebe**), **Common Terns** nesting on artificial rafts, **Grey Herons** still lingering around their breeding colony and a variety of warblers and other passerines can again be expected at Weir Wood Reservoir. The party will then move on to Ashdown Forest where the main business of the evening will be to find those two rather curious species, **Woodcock** and **Nightjar**, both of which are likely to be seen in flight over the heather and gorse among the Forest's scattered patches of woodland. Neither of these birds is likely to appear much before sunset and in the meantime we'll be looking out for heathland specialities such as **Woodlark**, **Dartford Warbler**, **Stonechat**, **Tree Pipit**, **Yellowhammer** and **Lesser Redpoll**.

Note: As we are so close to the longest day, we may have to remain out until as late as 11:00 pm to achieve our objectives. Insects may become rather active towards dusk and it can get surprisingly cold - so please remember to bring repellent and warm clothing!

Saturday, 4th July : Thursley Common

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8:00 am. Check details with Roger Tarran - 8660 2664).

Another visit to some impressive heathland habitat, this time just off the A3, south of Guildford. Again speciality species such as **Woodlark**, **Dartford Warbler**, **Stonechat**, **Redstart**, **Tree Pipit** and **Yellowhammer** will be sought. All three **Woodpeckers** do occur here too and **Spotted Flycatcher** has been regular. The reserve is particularly renowned both for **Hobbies** and for the wide range of dragonflies on which they prey. There are some interesting wetland plants to see as well and, if the weather is good, we'll be hoping to find the restricted range **Silver-studded Blue** butterfly.

Tuesday, 14th July : Rye Harbour LNR, Kent

(Meet at Rye Harbour car park - near the Martello Tower - at 10:15 am. Check details with Terry or Linda Osborn - 8679 2405).

A tempting prospect of a summer's day by the seaside - with birds (and more)! On the Beach Reserve, the colonies of **Black-headed** and **Mediterranean Gulls** and **Sandwich** and **Common Terns** at the Ternery Pool will still be busy, while more unusual visiting gulls or terns are also possible. **Ringed** and **Little Ringed Plovers** and **Lapwings** are likely to be present and the first returning waders from more northerly breeding grounds should also be appearing at this time. **Wheatears** and **Corn Buntings** are among the passerine species breeding hereabouts, while **Cetti's**, **Sedge** and **Reed Warblers** can be found around the various pools a little further inland. Many scarce and specialised plants thrive on the expanses of

re-vegetating shingle.

[Saturday, 25th July : Oare Marshes, Kent](#)

(Car trip, departing Fairfield Halls forecourt at 8:00 am. Check details with John Parish - 8681 7475 - or Roger Tarran - 8660 2664).

This Kent Wildlife Trust Reserve on the North Kent Marshes (fronting the Swale) is a favourite with many because of the unusual tameness often shown by the waders present here. These are likely to include **Avocet, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Curlew, Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Little Stint** and **Green Sandpiper**. **Garganey** and **Ruddy Duck** are possible among a wide good range of wildfowl and **Water Rail** will almost certainly be present in the reeds, along with **Bearded Tit**. **Kingfisher** and **Sand Martin** are also regular. **Little Tern** is often present over the Swale and by scanning the grazing marshes roundabout, with their scattering of bushes and occasional old buildings, we have a good chance of finding **Marsh Harrier, Hobby, Little Owl** and **Turtle Dove**. Noisy **Marsh Frogs** will certainly be present in the wet ditches and we may well spot a **Grass Snake** or two hunting them.

2. [Reports of recent Field Trips with the Croydon RSPB Group.](#)

[Sunday, 10th May : Samphire Hoe & St Margaret's Bay.](#) We enjoyed a beautifully sunny Spring day close (very close at times!) to the White Cliffs of Dover. The party of thirteen gathered first in [Samphire Hoe Country Park](#), a vast landscaped platform at the base of the cliffs south-west of Dover created using spoil dug from the Channel Tunnel. **Wheatear, Lesser Whitethroat** and cliff-nesting **House Martins** were among a variety of passerines found during a circuit of the site, but the 1000s of **Early Spider Orchids** probably created more of an impression. We also saw a **Dingy Skipper** and several **Wall** butterflies. While the rest of the party lunched, the writer found a **Black Redstart** and then watched a flock of nine **Pomarine Skuas** lumber past offshore, before being joined by other observers to catch two or three **Black Terns** and half-a-dozen **Gannets**. In the afternoon, we reassembled by the lighthouse at [St. Margaret's](#) for a walk along cliff tops. The colony of **Kittiwakes** here was out of our sight on the sheer face below us but we did see plenty of these dainty gulls flying to and fro. Unfortunately the weather was too good to have given any incoming summer migrants cause to linger, but it was pleasant enough just to enjoy the panoramic views of the ferries coming and going, with France clearly visible in the distance and **Skylarks** singing overhead. The colourful **Hoary Stocks** growing from the cliff face and **Nottingham Catchfly** in the downland turf were treats for our plant enthusiasts. (44 bird species were recorded during the day).

[Tuesday 19th May : Northward Hill & Cliffe Marshes](#)

On a mainly sunny though somewhat breezy spring day, The RSPB's Northward Hill reserve provided us with some excellent birding and we had encountered both **Cuckoo** (three in flight together) and **Turtle Dove** (purring away on nearby overhead wires) before even leaving the car park. The elevated viewpoints nearby command amazing views across the North Kent Marshes to the Thames Estuary and to Essex beyond and careful scanning revealed loads of birds, from raptors (**Marsh Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, and Hobby**) to waterfowl (including **Pochard** and **Ruddy Duck**) and waders (**Avocets** and **Oystercatchers** apparently breeding on irrigation ponds). A walk along the base of the woodland to the heronry (now containing **Little Egrets** as well as **Grey Herons**) also produced various **warblers** including **Cetti's**, but it required a brief visit to nearby Cliffe Pools to hear a **Nightingale** (bringing the day's bird total for the writer to 61).

[Sunday, 24th May : Stodmarsh.](#) A May visit to the pools, reedbeds and copses of the Stodmarsh Reserve in the Stour Valley of East Kent can always be relied upon to produce some memorable sightings, but the

bird-of-the-day on this occasion exceeded all expectations - it was a lifer for all 15 members of the party and perhaps the rarest bird ever encountered on our outings, a **Black-winged Pratincole**, no less! This atypical wader should have been on its breeding grounds between the Black Sea and Central Asia, but it performed really well here, resting in full view on the muddy margin of a scrape for quite a while before circling low overhead for a few minutes, clearly demonstrating all of its diagnostic features. Of course, on a fine, sunny day, we had plenty more of interest, too, including **Marsh Harrier, Hobby, Garganey, Little Ringed Plover, Greenshank, Avocet, Turtle Dove, Cuckoo, Bearded Tit, Spotted Flycatcher, Cetti's and Garden Wablers, Wheatear and Nightingale**, all contributing to an excellent species day total of 79. Also most remarkable was a constant determined passage of **Painted Lady** butterflies, all heading north-west; hundreds must have crossed the reserve during the day, forming just a small part of what we later learned was a mass-migration affecting the whole of South-east England.

*[Where were you.....at 11:00 am on 26th May, 2001? If you are JB, SM, MN, AP, JP, KP, BS, GS, YS, DT, RT or ST, you were at Pagham Harbour watching a **Collared Pratincole** that we had just found flying over the Ferry Pool and going on to land in a set-aside field just to the south, where it was just about discernible through scopes. AP hurried back to the visitor centre to tell the warden and had a very difficult time convincing him to come out and see the new arrival for himself. Eventually he did....and the rest is history! Ironically, we had been scheduled to visit Stodmarsh that day, but the Foot & Mouth outbreak was in full swing and only Pagham was open to visitors.]*

Saturday, 6th June : Lakenheath Fen & Weeting Heath .

Last year's coach outing to these two Norfolk/Suffolk Breckland venues was badly-affected by rain, so it was good to visit again in dry conditions, though it was again a little windy. This time, with the help of RSPB Lakenheath Fen Reserve Manager Norman Sills, our party of ten found the nest of a pair of **Golden Orioles** at the edge of one of the poplar plantations and enjoyed good scope views of both the male and female visiting it. As we watched these scarce and colourful birds, **Bitterns** were frequently heard booming from the reed bed to our rear and later we saw one of them in flight. A group of six **Hobbies**, a morning's total of about ten **Marsh Harriers, Bearded Tits** (for some) and a pair of **Garganey** on the lagoon by the Little Ouse were the pick of other sightings at this site. After moving to Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Weeting Heath reserve in mid-afternoon, we waited patiently for the breeding **Stone-Curlews** to emerge over the breast of the slope in front of the hides - but unfortunately it was not to be (a **Stoat** running around where they should have appeared did not help). However, we did have good looks at **Spotted Flycatcher** and **Marsh Tit**, as well as some rather distant scope views of a **Little Owl** before heading for home with a day's bird list of 64 species.

3. Beddington's Wandering Tree Sparrows.

Most recipients of this Bulletin will be aware of the importance of the Tree Sparrow breeding colony at Beddington Farm - one of the largest, if not *the* largest, in Britain, with 133 breeding pairs producing close to 1000 offspring in 2007. However you may not know that many of these Sparrows disappear from the Farm each winter before showing up again in spring to reclaim places in the nest boxes. Very few Tree Sparrows are seen in local areas off the Farm during the winter months (or, at least, very few are reported), so where the absent birds actually go is a mystery - it's possible they may move a considerable distance away in their search for suitable food sources. During next winter, Terry Osborn and I intend to join forces with fellow birders using the network of RSPB members' groups across southeast England in an attempt to locate these missing Beddington Tree Sparrows. However, we also need to keep a watch closer to home to try to ensure that nothing is being overlooked and therefore we would like to invite readers of this Bulletin to assist us in our quest during the coming winter (that is from August onwards) by simply keeping an eye open for Tree Sparrows and also by investigating any mixed finch and sparrow

flocks that they find or hear about to determine whether these might contain Tree Sparrows. If Tree Sparrows are found, it would be very helpful if you could try to ascertain whether any are carrying metal rings on their legs, as this would probably indicate a Beddington origin. And then, of course, be sure to keep either Terry (t.osborn059@btinternet.com) or me informed about your findings. Terry and I guide parties of RSPB members around Beddington Farm on one Sunday morning each month so, if you would like to see the Tree Sparrows at their breeding site (and many other good birds besides), contact Terry or me for the dates of these visits.

Many Thanks.

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14th June, 2009