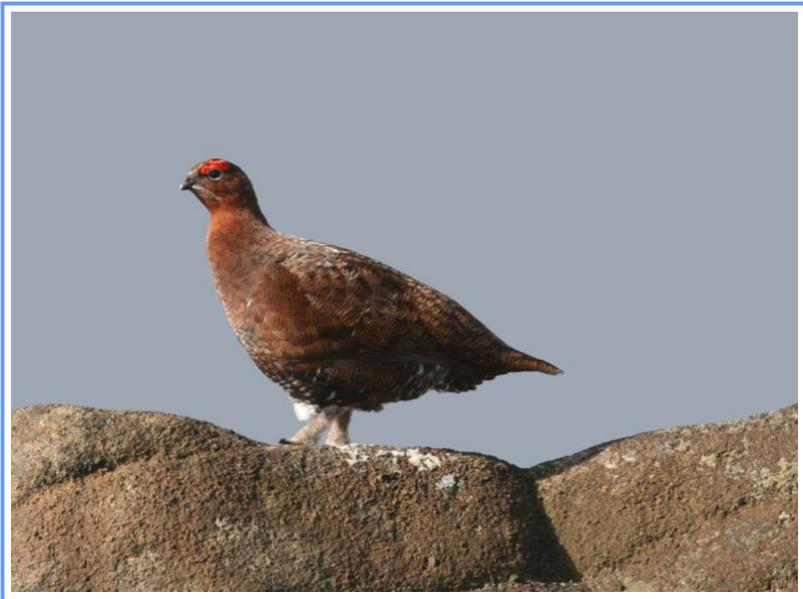




**ISSUE 4
2010**

THE DIPPER

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HOPE VALLEY BIRD WATCHERS CLUB



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As always, thanks are due to the members and guest contributors for their interesting articles and photographs. We always welcome articles, whether these are bird watching experiences, holidays, book reviews or whatever. A special thank you is due to David Gains who has stepped down as editor of the magazine after editing the last 3 issues. He also volunteered to proof read this issue for us! Hopefully we will be able to maintain his high standards in the future. AWK

Front Cover Photograph: Red Grouse © Alan Kydd

Red grouse seem to be making a come-back on the moors . There were certainly many more after the 2008/9 winter than in recent years. This obliging bird was followed for some time around Derwent Edge in March 2009. It was taken with a Canon EOS 400D SLR with EF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6L IS USM with settings of ISO 400, F/14 and 1/160th sec.



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the fourth biennial edition of the Hope Valley Bird Watchers Club magazine.

Thank you to all those who have written articles for this edition and in particular to Alan Kydd, the magazine editor.

This year, 2010, is the twentieth anniversary of the Club. Our first meeting was held at the Millstone Inn in 1990 where Kit Stokes gave a talk and slide show about a visit to the Falkland Islands. Bird watching seems to become more popular every year. There are more bird reserves to visit, more bird watching holidays available, more different types of food available to attract birds into your garden and new and better equipment to photograph, record and identify birds. The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve at Potteric Carr, a 45 minute drive from the Hope Valley, is a case in point. This reserve has grown in size over recent years

and has many different habitats. Several Bitterns overwinter there in most years. Our club visits this reserve twice a year and we always finish with a substantial bird list. (see page 4 ed.)

Looking out of our window across the Hope Valley we have an almost daily sighting of Buzzard, often hunting for rabbits. We also have daily sighting of Sparrowhawk, Kestrel and the occasional Raven. In contrast, many smaller birds are becoming scarcer every year. Last year there were very few Willow Warblers around Hathersage, they used to be the most common summer song bird in the valley.

Finally, I would like to thank all the committee members for helping to keep the club running smoothly over the past two years, and to wish all club members successful bird watching in 2010.

THE BIRDS AND THE BEES

For the past six years we have made several visits to southern Portugal to our son's house which is situated in a small village 27 km north of Faro, 450m high in the Sierra de Alcaria do Cume.

The whole area is very hilly and was intensively farmed about 60 years ago. Now it is very wild and all that is harvested are olives, the bark from cork-oak trees and a few grapes.

The area is fantastic for birds with over 82 species seen there. The whole area is very quiet and apart from birdsong, the main background noise is from bees. In spring

and summer they feed on numerous wild flowers and flowering shrubs and in winter on flowering cork-oak trees.

It seems that every time we visit, more and more beehives have been put out to collect the honey. This seems to be in contrast to the plight of honey bees in Britain and the USA where hives are being wiped out by an as yet unidentified cause. No agro-chemicals are used in this area of Portugal but are used extensively in Britain and the USA. The 'experts' seem undecided as to why our bees are disappearing.

FIELD TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

The following are some of the highlights from the field trips in 2008 and 2009. The numbers of birds recorded on the day are shown in brackets after the dates.

Clumber Park

Our usual start to the Field Trip season 6.01.08 (52) and 3.01.09 (51).

On a cold but clear day in 2009 we found the usual wildfowl with 3 Goosanders, 4 Little Grebes, a female Goldeneye and 2 pairs of Mandarin ducks to keep us interested. There were a few small flocks of Redpolls.

Our regular 'dawn chorus' visit 8.05.08 (71) and 25.04.09 (64)

In 2009, at least one, possibly two, Cuckoos were present, calling quite frequently. Large numbers of Redpoll (up to 100) were flying about and a pair of Crossbills was a treat. A Tree Pipit provided some memorable displays, but a solitary Woodlark gave all too brief bursts of song. As well as Sedge Warbler, Linnets, Green Woodpecker, Yellow Wagtail and Redstart, the usual entourage of wildfowl, heath and woodland birds maintained Clumber's reputation for a good day's birding.

Our nightjar hunt 22.07.08.

We had good views of a roding Woodcock but it wasn't so good for Nightjars. We heard two or three but only had a fleeting glimpse of a single bird. We had grand views of Turtle Doves on the wires from the raptor watch point at Welbeck on the way there.

Ogston Reservoir 12.01.09 (36)

It was a very wet visit relieved by an excellent lunch at the (recently re-opened)

Horse & Jockey at Wessington. Several Goldeneyes were present and 2 Pink-footed Geese were found between the hide and Brackenfield village. There were quite a few Snipe.

Potteric Carr

This YWT reserve continues to attract new birds as the extended wetlands area develops.

12.02.08 (48) A warm, sunny and windless day yielded 2 Bittern – the main reason for our winter visit.

11.08.08 (48) and 10.08.09 (49)

We were lucky with the weather again and enjoyed the sight of Black-necked Grebe with a juvenile on our August visit in 2008. Other highlights in our summer visits included Kingfisher, Peregrine, Garganey, Little Egret and Raven.

28.11.08 (59)

Our November visit was memorable for views of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Merlin, Pintail, Water Rail and Bittern.



Water Rail © Alan Kydd

Carr Vale 18.04.08 (49)

Carr Vale is normally our first spring field trip when we usually find our first summer migrants for the year.



Yellowhammer © Alan Kydd

There was a very icy easterly wind but we were well rewarded for the effort. The feeders gave us great views of Bullfinch, Willow Tit, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting. Thirty or more Swallows were joined by a few House Martins and Sand Martins over the water but failed to convince us summer was soon coming! Waders were represented by 3 Redshanks, 3 Little Ringed Plovers, several Lapwings and a pair of Oystercatchers. Other highlights included a Kingfisher and a roosting Little Owl. The mound was surprisingly warm and sheltered from the wind, unlike our usual lunch spot where we spotted a Sparrowhawk. As we passed the sewage works on our way back at least 13 Pied Wagtails were counted. The weather meant we didn't see our usual butterflies, such as orange-tip.

Goyt Valley 12/05/2008

The first club trip to this area for several years.

The weather was glorious – hot and sunny with little wind. The birds were vociferous but proved very tricky to see. Our experts

identified Pied Flycatcher, Common Sandpiper, Tree Pipit and Redstart from their calls but most only managed to see the Redstarts. Wood Warblers were either very quiet or absent! After a couple of hours we decided to head back to the car and try our luck at Swallow Moss - to see if the Black Grouse were still there. We spent an hour or so over lunch there and discovered that the Black Grouse had been missing for several years. There were lots of Redpolls about and a very loud Whitethroat. We also had great views of a Peregrine. We returned home via Hartington and Long Dale, where we had excellent views of a Little Owl from the car.

Whisby Pits 24/05/08 (61) and 23/05/09 (62)

This is now the best field trip to find Nightingales, but timing is critical. In 2008 no-one saw any and only a few members heard snatches of their song. In 2009 we only managed to see one bird. This year we plan to visit earlier, when we hope they might be more vocal. Plenty of other warblers were present in 2008 including a magnificent Garden Warbler and several singing Lesser Whitethroats, as well as Whitethroat, Blackcap, Sedge Warbler,



Little Ringed Plover © David Gains

Reed Warbler, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff. A pair of Little Ringed Plovers had a nest and a lone Greenshank was actively feeding. Turtle Dove was absent in 2008 but we had good views in 2009. Sadly, the Sand Martin colony was completely deserted in 2009 – apparently having been destroyed by badger activity.

Blacktoft Sands 2/08/08 (49), 10/07/09 (57) and 8/09/09 (36)

Although overcast and breezy, it remained dry and relatively free of harvest flies in 2008! Astonishingly, there were no Avocets - it seems Black-headed Gulls predated the few nests that there were at the beginning of the breeding season. Nearly a dozen species of wader were present, comprising: 3 Little Stints, 3 Green Sandpipers, a Common Sandpiper and numerous Snipe, Lapwing, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Spotted Redshank, Greenshank and Ruff. Several Marsh Harriers were also present, together with a Barn Owl in a nest box. A Water Rail was also very obliging, stretching and sunbathing at the edge of the reed beds.



Greenshank © David Gains

Our July 2009 visit was equally rewarding. At the Marshlands hide we had good views of Bearded Tits, together with some summer plumaged Spotted Redshanks.

Just as we were about to leave the hide, a Whimbrel dropped in to ensure a memorable start. The water level on all the pools was very low. Ousefleet was totally dry, as expected, but so was the pool at the eastern end overlooked by Singleton hide which is most unusual. Despite this, there were quite a few waders present with Lapwing, Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Snipe, Ruff, Green Sandpiper, Avocet, Greenshank, Oystercatcher and Common Sandpiper. This gave us a total of 13 waders, with no fewer than 5 Marsh Harriers.

Gibraltar Point 30/08/08 (65)

A glorious day was made all the better with a marvellous 65 species. A slow flying Peregrine was a fantastic sight, giving plenty of time to see this magnificent raptor; the birds on the beach weren't as impressed though! Offshore, near the sand banks, an Arctic Skua was harassing a Common Tern for its fish. Other highlights included Grey Plover, Kingfisher, Lesser Whitethroat, Marsh Harrier, Pintail, Reed Warbler, Ringed Plover, Sanderling and Sandwich Tern.

Old Moor Wetlands 14/10/09 (56)

The day dawned overcast but warm and very still. We had a good count of 9 waders - Lapwing, Snipe, Redshank, Golden Plover, Dunlin, Green Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff and Curlew Sandpiper. The Golden Plover were easily disturbed but probably numbered between 500 and 1,000. A few of the locals insisted that one of the Dunlins was a Sanderling - but we remained unconvinced! We had quite good views of a Peregrine in a dead tree. It later seemed to be feeding perched on a distant electricity pylon - being carefully watched by a Mistle Thrush!

Some of us called in at Broomhill Flash while in the area for a quick visit. There was nothing of note to report apart from another Green Sandpiper and a group of Red-legged Partridge.

Fairburn Ings 15/10/08 (59)

The day started on a low note with rather dull weather and the first bird hide being "replaced this week so not accessible". Highlights of the day included a couple of Kingfishers briefly at the Cut hide, and memorable views of Black Swans. A pair with cygnets swam by before lunch and a few minutes later we had another fly by. None of us had seen these birds as juveniles or flying. The wings look pure white when in flight. There were flocks of Redpolls and Siskins around, a few Redwings and a pair of Pintails towards the end of the day from Lin Dyke hide.

Leighton Moss 1/11/08 (56)

There was a slight breeze but otherwise the weather was sunny and quite mild. Starting at the shoreline hides, there were good numbers of water birds, including Pintail, Shoveler, Little Egret, Greenshank and Red-breasted Merganser but no Godwit or Ruff. A Kingfisher was seen very briefly by some as it perched in front of the hide. For a change, we wandered down to the coast and, although there was little to see on the sea, the huge flocks of Oystercatchers were most impressive! On the main reserve, we didn't bother with the two furthest hides, but managed to see Snipe and Buzzard.

Carsington Water 15/12/08 (48)

We had an excellent day with bright and clear weather and no wind. From the Paul Stanley Hide a male Scaup was eventually discerned masquerading as a Pochard.

Whilst there, we also saw two Kingfishers and a Buzzard. As usual for this time of year there were large numbers of wildfowl, which included a few displaying Goldeneyes in superb breeding plumage. Over 300 Lapwings were around with almost 50 Little Grebes and 6 Redshanks. Other highlights included a couple of Willow Tits, several Bullfinches and towards the end of the day we had excellent views of a Great Northern Diver off Stones Island.

Martin Mere 21/12/08 (52)

Our regular trip to see the wildfowl spectacle.

As usual there were plenty of Whooper Swans, Pintails, Wigeons and Pink-footed Geese. Other highlights included Buzzard, Water Rail, two Ruddy Shelducks (both feral, one a Shelduck x Ruddy Shelduck hybrid), Barnacle Geese as well as a Red-breasted Goose and Tree Sparrows. We eventually identified the single Bewick swan present in the massed ranks of Whoopers!



Whooper Swans © Alan Kydd

THE EYES HAVE IT

Although apparently not rare, until last summer I had never seen an Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillar (larva). It is truly a magnificent insect measuring some 3 to 3.1/2” in length, with two incredibly large eye spots.

It can extend its foremost segments to resemble an elephant’s trunk, hence its name. However, with these segments retracted it looks more like a small snake, which is thought to have some defensive value. I saw this one sunning itself on a dry stone wall next to my vegetable path! According to the book, it feeds on Bedstraw and Willow Herb, the latter of which is abundant in Ughill.

The moth, which is spectacular, flies at night, feeds on flowers and honeysuckle and is even more difficult to see by chance. So – keep your ‘eyes’ open!



© John Jackson

BIRD QUIZ

1. In N. America this duck is known as ‘Old Squaw’ – which duck is that?
2. Sand Martins excavate nest holes mainly with their feet – True or False?
3. Which one of our common water birds can be found on 5 continents?
4. Bar-tailed Godwits breeding in Alaska winter 6,000 miles away. Where?
5. Which 2 of our 5 owl species are missing from Ireland?
6. A Goldcrest weighs about the same as a 20p coin. True or False?
7. Which of our warblers has been termed the ‘Northern Nightingale’?
8. None of our grebes can walk on land. True or False?
9. Cetti’s Warbler first bred in UK in 1973. True or False?
10. What is the largest European wading bird?
11. The Egyptian Goose is related to the Shelduck. True or False?
12. Which is the U.K.’s heaviest duck?
13. Goosanders first bred in the UK in 1921. True or False?
14. Why is the Hen Harrier so named?
15. Which of our owls is **least** nocturnal?
16. Gardens with House Sparrows had on average about 10 in 1979 – how many were there by 2009?
17. Kentish Plover stopped breeding in U.K. in 1965. True or False?
18. Which of these nest in tree holes – Goosander or Red-breasted Merganser?
19. Which is not to be found in Northern Scotland – Reed Warbler or Sedge Warbler?
20. How long do our warblers take to cross the Sahara desert?

AROUND THE OKAVANGO

Botswana is a real country of contrasts. With little or no rain, the Okavango Delta is an amazing wetland area. The Okavango River feeds water from Angola into the delta, which is in the shape of a hand with fingers. In good years the rain reaches the very tips of the 'fingers' providing much needed water for all the animals and local farmers. We spent three days on a houseboat moving each day to a different location then taking trips out on launches to get closer to the wildlife. After a relaxed few days we had a bumpy journey east through Namibia's Caprivi Strip to Livingstone in Zambia.



The purpose of this part of the holiday was to see Victoria Falls. A true spectacle, although not in full spate, it was amazing to see the Zambezi River literally plummeting over a cliff edge into a huge 100 metre gorge below. We were lucky enough to take a helicopter ride which gave us a really good overview of the whole area.

The final part of our holiday took us back into Botswana and bush camping through three wildlife parks. The camp sites came alive at night with jackals, honey badgers and hyenas making raids on the food trailer. One night we had elephants

walking through our camp within six feet of our small tents.

Chobe National Park has over 35,000 elephants and we certainly saw lots of them, many up close. With so many



Water Buck © Barbara Wooddisse

mammals and birds it is hard to pick out a favourite experience. Seeing wild dogs have a 'face off' with three elephants who wanted to protect one of their little babies was memorable. As also was a pride of about twenty lions so close that we could have stepped out of our vehicle and touched them, obviously something we decided against!



This part of Africa is less touristy than parts of Kenya and South Africa and although the 'roads' leave much to be desired, the discomfort of travelling is more than made up for by the sights and sounds we experienced.

A VISIT TO CHINA

In October 2009 I travelled with Explore for a 19 day tour of China. We flew Air China from Heathrow to Hong Kong, via Beijing, but our bags stayed an extra night in Beijing! Annoying, but hey, this is an Explore trip, we don't need to look smart! On the first morning after arrival we met the rest of the group, 14 of us plus Rich, our Tour Leader.

We spent 1½ days exploring Hong Kong, then took a sleeper train from Shenzhen, on the Chinese border, to Guilin where we boarded a boat for a half-day cruise along the Li River to Yangshuo, a small tourist town. The scenery was amazing and, as it was misty, very atmospheric. The river weaves between sheer-sided karst (limestone) peaks, weathered into various shapes, passing villages and bamboo groves typical of southern China's rural areas.



We saw fishermen on bamboo rafts using trained cormorants to catch fish. They suspend lights over the water to attract fish and the cormorants, which are tethered and have rings round the base of their necks, catch the fish and then disgorge them for the fishermen.

We spent 2 days in Yangshuo exploring the countryside, including a visit to a local village where we were invited into the house of an 81 year old lady and allowed to look round her home while she explained her way

of life. In one room there was a coffin, ready for when she needs it! We hired bikes for an early morning ride along the river and through small farming villages (I only fell off once!), and there were optional classes in Chinese cookery, calligraphy and Mahjong. I did the calligraphy and learned to write 1-10, my name, and a few other words in Mandarin.

We left Yangshuo for an overnight stay in a mountain village, Ping' An, in the Longji area, famous for rice terraces which climb to 800m. While out walking we met a group of women of the Yao minority wearing national dress, who demonstrated how they tie their long hair.



In China there are about 55 ethnic minorities, each with their own distinctive customs, costumes and, in many cases, languages.

Returning to Guilin we flew to Chengdu to visit the Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding, founded in 1987. It's a non-profit organisation engaged in wildlife research, captive breeding, conservation education and educational tourism. The pandas are so cute! After this we had a vegetarian lunch at a Buddhist Monastery before driving to Dazu for the night. That evening we ate at a street stall, recommended by Rich. The food was delicious but I resisted trying the deep fried locusts! The standard of food throughout the holiday was superb.



Dazu is famous for its Buddha rock carvings - the hills around are riddled with caves and grottoes decorated with more than 50,000 carvings, some of which date back to the Tang dynasty (7th Century). We visited the Rock Carvings at Baoding Shan, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site dating back to 1179 AD.

From here we drove to Chongqing, the largest city in China, with a population of 32 million. After a brief tour of the city and a hot pot meal, we boarded the *Yangtze Angel*, our home for the next 3 nights while we cruised the Three Gorges on the Yangtze River. This is the 3rd longest river in the world at 3917 miles, and we cruised 4 miles to Yichang, a few miles past the Three Gorges Dam. En route we visited Fengdu, named the 'City of Ghosts' due to the mountain, Ming Shan, which is dedicated to the afterworld, with statues of ghosts and devils as well as graphic wax depictions of life in hell.



The Three Gorges Dam is the world's largest and the reservoir behind it is 410 miles long. The water started to rise in 2003 and should have reached 575 feet above sea level in 2009. When we were there the level was about 30 feet below the maximum. The main purpose is to improve flood control and navigation on the river, in addition to increasing hydro electric power production in central China. It will boost fisheries, tourism and recreational activities, and help to irrigate drought-prone provinces north of the Yangtze. However, it has been controversial since inception because approximately 1.5 million people from over 1000 cities, towns and villages have had to be re-housed.

The younger generation are happy to have better living conditions, but there are serious environmental issues including loss of farmland, endangered animal species, lost historical sites, and fears of pollution and sedimentation. Despite the rise of the water level, the cruise through the Three Gorges was still spectacular, however we'd have liked some sunshine! It was misty most of the time.

We disembarked in Yichang and flew to Shanghai for 3 nights. I loved Shanghai, despite the amount of construction work being undertaken to prepare for Expo 2010 which is being held there this year. Under the expert guidance of our local guide, Heidi (quite a character), we visited the Jade Buddha Temple, the 16th Century Yu Yuan, Shanghai Museum, Nanjing Road, and the 100th floor viewing platform of the Shanghai World Finance Centre. We were let loose for an afternoon and finding our way back to the hotel using the Metro was quite a challenge!



From Shanghai we flew to Xi'an for 1 night to visit the Terracotta Army, which was an amazing sight. There is still an enormous amount of work to be done and much of the area has not yet been excavated. The figures were discovered in 1974 by farmers digging a well. They were made to guard the tomb of Qin Shi Huangdi who ruled China over 2000 years ago. They vary between 6 ft and 6 ft 5 ins (the generals being the tallest) and each has unique features. They include generals, warriors, horsemen, archers, and musicians.

It is estimated that in the 3 pits containing the Terracotta Army there were over 8000 soldiers, 300 cavalry horses and 100 chariots with horses, the majority of which are still buried in the pits. So far more than a 1000 figures have been re-assembled.

We travelled overnight from Xi'an to Beijing by sleeper train, and were met at 7.15am by Sherrie, our guide in Beijing. We settled in to our hotel and then went to visit Tian'anmen Square, one of the largest in the world. It holds nearly 500,000 people. The mausoleum of Mao Zedong is there and we saw 100's of people queuing to see his embalmed body. From there we went to the Forbidden City, the Imperial Palace completed in 1240, from where 24 emperors ruled for almost 500 years.

The last day of the holiday was the day we visited the Great Wall of China – wow – it was magical! We left early and arrived at the Wall (Mutianyu section) at 9.00 am, just as the mist was lifting and the sun came out in a clear blue sky. We went up to the Wall by cable car and had 2 hours to walk wherever we wanted to go. Some of the sections were very steep, with deep steps, and it was amazing to think that the Wall is 3000 miles long. This was my highlight of the trip. We returned to Beijing in the afternoon and had our final meal together – Peking Duck. The next morning 4 of us got up at 6.00 am to visit the local park to see the locals doing Tai'chi. It was cold and misty but a great atmosphere. We returned to the hotel for breakfast and at 9.00 am left for the airport to return to the UK. It was a fantastic holiday, and a fascinating country to visit, although we wished we'd been 10 years ago, before it changed so dramatically.



BUZZARD – OUR MOST COMMON RAPTOR

The BTO claim that the Buzzard is now Britain's most common bird of prey. They are now regularly seen in the valley. There has certainly been a spectacular eastwards colonisation of Buzzard from their stronghold in Wales and the South West during the last fifteen years. We have in the past seen Buzzards at bird reserves near Barnsley and Doncaster. Only last summer I saw Kestrel, Sparrowhawk (the other two common raptors) and Buzzard in the space of ten minutes along our lane.

Mick Taylor from the Peak Raptor Group wrote in our 2006 magazine "Buzzard continue to increase and infill and must be at, or very near to maximum density, and they are an increasingly common sight in our area, except in the northern grouse shooting areas where persecution is still a problem".

Buzzards will eat a wide range of animal

flesh, even earthworms when larger prey is unavailable. At present there is a plentiful supply of rabbits and I am sure this has helped the increase in this area.



Common Buzzard © John Wooddisse

Older members of our club will remember our annual trip to mid-Wales to see Red Kite, Raven and Buzzard. Now only Red Kite are missing in our area, but they are not very far away. If they can avoid the grouse moors, they will soon be seen in the valley.

THE NEST RECORD SCHEME

When, in 2008, I stumbled upon a Pied Wagtail's nest at work, I wondered whether anyone would be interested. I was vaguely aware of the Nest Record Scheme run by the British Trust for Ornithology but thought that they may be interested in rare species only.

In fact, I learned that the Nest Record Scheme (NRS) welcomes records of all nesting birds, although they do have target species, which are the more difficult to find 'open nesting' ones such as finches, warblers and buntings.

After registering my interest, I received an instruction pack, which tells you the basic details that are needed, such as date, species, location, nest contents, habitat and nest site. These data can be submitted on either nest record cards or by using software that they provide. With my Pied Wagtail records despatched I was duly encouraged for a new challenge in 2009: I was going to find more nests! This turned out to be easier said than done because try as I might I couldn't find any nests on my local patch – about 100 acres of woodland, scrub and meadow. Evidently, this is a common problem these days. 'Nest finding' skills used to be learned in childhood when egg collecting was popular. However, increasing enforcement of the Protection of Birds Act 1954 and Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 has (quite rightly) made egg collecting unacceptable but has also reduced 'nest finding'. Gaining these 'nest finding' skills is really a matter of studying out-of-print books on birds' eggs and nests or finding a mentor who is willing to pass on their expertise. Alternatively, you can sign up to

one of the increasing number of courses being organised by the BTO.

Anyway, my perseverance paid off and I located the nests of a Song Thrush, Long-tailed Tit, Nuthatch and, amazingly, two pairs of Sparrowhawks. Sadly, the Song Thrush and Long-tailed Tits nests failed but I was able to follow the others through to fledging. Following the Sparrowhawk families was fascinating, though you had to be watchful of one of the adult females!

When everyone has sent in their records, the BTO scientists analyse them to learn how clutch sizes, brood sizes, laying dates and nesting failure rates are changing. A recent analysis of data between 1971 and 1995 has shown that many species are laying their eggs about 9 days earlier, possibly in response to climate change.



Sparrowhawk © David Gains

The NRS is not a *carte blanche* to disturb breeding birds, their welfare remains paramount and there are strict guidelines to follow. Ultimately, if any undue disturbance is likely, you stop. Of course, it's still unlawful to look for Schedule 1 species like Barn Owl and Kingfisher, unless you obtain an appropriate licence.

Today, the NRS is enjoying its highest level of participation for many years, with over 450 participants sending in 34,000 nest records in 2008, but more volunteers are desperately needed. If you are interested in becoming a nest recorder,

whether it is to record details of a Blackbird's nest in your garden or to go 'nest finding', contact the Nest Records Officer at BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU.

PEAK DISTRICT V THE CHILTERN

Rob and I moved to Edale in 2006, after living for over 30 years in Oxfordshire at the foot of the Chiltern Hills "Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty".

Having lived here for 3 ½ years now, we have, of course, noticed many differences. The Chiltern Hills are obviously not as high or bleak as those found in the Peak District. They are basically chalk uplands, with thousands of acres of beautiful woods and open grassland to explore. We do miss the quiet peacefulness of the ancient woods, where we could go for a sheltered walk on a windy day. The massive beeches and oak trees, originally grown for the furniture industry, are home to so many creatures, from insects and bugs, to birds and mammals. We were once privileged to be shown a tiny dormouse curled up asleep in a nest box on a juniper bush – another speciality of the area. Here most of the woods are more recent, planted specimens, except the small old gnarled and twisted oaks that have had to survive hundreds of years of harsh Peak District weather. These too, of course, are home to rarities like the Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler, which we never saw in the south.

The Chilterns' thin soil of the open land supports colourful wild meadows with hundreds of flower species, including many types of orchids and even the delicate Pasque flower and its own

"Chiltern" Gentian. But here we have the amazing purple heathers, the snowy white cotton grass and the bronze bracken of the open moorlands to feast our eyes on instead. One really good advantage of walking up here is the peaty soil – it doesn't stick to your boots! We often used to find ourselves walking in fields below the Chilterns with a large plate of claggy soil attached to each boot which rubbed off in great lumps onto our trousers. It sometimes felt as if we were walking with large concrete blocks on our feet! Here, you might sink up to your ankles in a peat soup, but as soon as you can extricate yourself, your boots are virtually clean again. We also appreciate the wonderful "non-slip" millstone grit under our feet, and always try to walk in the areas where it abounds on a wet day, rather than the really slippery limestone.

Brown hares are quite common here, and I much prefer to see them running effortlessly across our fields than the numerous rabbits that are all too common on the chalk grasslands in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire – they really are a pest there to farmers and gardeners alike. We don't seem to be very lucky at spotting mountain hares, but the few we have seen are very beautiful. Badgers too, seem more common up here, and I never tire of watching our stripy-faced residents coming to gorge themselves on peanuts

outside our window – even though this seems to give them even more energy to dig up our fields!

But of course, as a bird watcher, one of the main differences I notice is the bird life.



Red Kite © Alan Kydd

The first Red Kites to be re-introduced to England were set free about 5 miles from our old home. By the time we left they had become so numerous that you could spot at least one (sometimes as many as 30 where a farmer was ploughing or making hay) whenever you looked up into the sky. I find that whenever we go back to our old “patch”, I just have to wave and say ‘Hi’ to the first kite I spot! Their haunting call has become part of the countryside there, and I really miss it. We also had far more Buzzards there, although I know that they are increasing in number quite rapidly all over the country. To watch half a dozen of these birds circling high on the thermals is quite hypnotic.

To have any chance of spotting some birds that are common here in summer, like the Lapwing and Curlew, you would have to visit a nature reserve like RSPB Otmoor in the South. I remember seeing Lapwings doing their amazing courtship display

flight over a wet field near our home every summer. Then to my dismay, one autumn about 10 years ago the farmer had the whole field mole-drained, after which they never returned. Hopefully that would not be allowed to happen now. I love to have different birds at my bird table now – Redpolls, Siskin, Brambling and Linnets all visit here.

I certainly don’t miss the Rook families that used to come from the noisy rookery across the road, and swing on the feeders every day in summer until all the food had fallen out; or the groups of Woodpigeons that devoured everything on the bird table in minutes. The few we have here seem shyer than their Oxford relatives, and don’t come near the house.



Siskin © Alan Kydd

Although we enjoyed the area we used to live in, I know we both love exploring the wild places that are so easily available here in the Peak District, away from the hustle and bustle of the South. We still have many areas to explore, and we appreciate the ever-changing views from our house of the beautiful Edale valley, Mam Tor and the Kinder Ridge.

Share your wildlife photos taken in Derbyshire at www.derbybirdpix.co.uk

COSTA RICA WILDLIFE

Costa Rica is a small Central American country about the size of Wales, on the isthmus of land between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean, with Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south. It is also a relatively peaceful country without an army, whose main income is from eco-tourism and growing fruit. We went there in February 2008 with Explore and were amazed at the varied climatic zones in such a small country. Running down the central spine is a chain of volcanoes, some as high as 9000 ft. The diversity of the wildlife is amazing with many different mammals, reptiles, fish and 850 bird species.



We started our two week tour from the capital San Jose. On our first morning on our way to look down into a volcano, we saw several Quetzals in a fruiting fig tree. They are parrot-like birds with very long tails, and are the Guatamalan national bird. A few years previously we had spent two weeks in Guatamala without seeing any!

We then visited the Tortuguero National Park on the Caribbean coast. On several early morning and late afternoon river boat trips through mangroves, we saw otters, crocodiles, lizards, tree frogs and many Egrets and Storks. We then headed by boat

along the Nicaraguan border and south to the town of Santa Elena, which nestles under the active Aranal volcano. During a walk along the base of the volcano we could hear the eruptions and see molten lava rolling down the side. Close by we saw several birds of prey including the graceful Swallow-tailed Kite.



Iguana © John Wooddisse

After Aranal, we travelled south to the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve. Here we had a guided walk with a professional ornithologist who showed us many new bird species including Toucans, Tanagers and several species of Hummingbird. Bird guiding is very popular here with several bird guides waiting to take tourists birding along the forest trails.

We then travelled south to the Manuel Antonia National Park on the Pacific coast. Here, we saw several seabirds and waders including, frigatebirds, pelicans, boobies and also a whimbrel. In the park, which runs down to the sea, there were capuchin, howler and squirrel monkeys and also coati and racoons. Altogether it was a great trip with 244 bird species seen and also an insight into the potential of how eco-tourism is flourishing on the demand from visitors from the USA and further afield.

A DAY ON THE FARNE ISLANDS

June 24th 2009 dawned dry and sunny with virtually no wind. It was perfect weather for our first trip to the Farnes since September 1970. Back then, we had a very rough boat trip in a very strong wind - and we weren't bird watchers. We probably went to see the seals! We thought we saw lots of birds back then, but it was nothing compared to what can be found on the islands in June!

There are several boats operating from Seahouses these days and we'd booked for a 10.00 boat for a full day trip. After a visit around the outer islands to see the many seals, we were dropped off on Staple Island. This is the largest of the outer group of islands some 5 miles off the coast. It was heaving with nesting birds. These were mainly shags, kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills and puffins. Despite the large numbers of human visitors, the birds seemed unaffected and were too busy looking after their nests, eggs and offspring to be bothered by us. There were literally thousands of puffins flying to and



Puffin © Alan Kydd

fro with sand eels. They had to run the gauntlet of the gulls that would steal their catch. The two hours spent there were

soon over and we then moved on to the largest of the islands a few miles nearer the coast – Inner Farne.



Arctic Tern © Alan Kydd

In addition to the birds we'd seen on Staple Island, here were the large colonies of Arctic Terns whose aerial attacks on visitors are now famous. It's amazing how close they allow folk to get to their nests, even when they have young, but there's a line beyond which they take strong action – it's essential to wear a hat! There are also smaller numbers of Sandwich Terns and a few Common Terns here, but they sensibly nest further from the paths and areas where visitors congregate. Once more, the 2 hours flew by and we were on our way back to the mainland where we retired for fish and chips overlooking Seahouses harbour.

The islands are managed by the National Trust and there are wardens living on Inner Farne throughout the breeding season. When asked whether the birds were being disturbed by the huge numbers of visitors now going there, the answer is – far from it. Most of the birds nest on the islands where there are the largest numbers of visitors. There are other smaller undisturbed islands, just as suitable, that

they could move to, but it seems that there is no incentive for them to do so. It may even be that the visitors provide a degree of protection from predators and actually improve the chances of successful breeding. We were delighted to find the breeding bird colonies in such good health

after hearing about the disasters in similar colonies in Scotland and other place around the British Coast.

It was a memorable day and highly recommended. Sadly, the fish and chips were truly AWFUL.

BONE COLLECTING

My fascination with bird skulls began when I was beachcombing in Runswick Bay some years ago. In the detritus on the tide line I came across this delicate, sea washed, beach tumbled and sculptural skull. Light, yet so strong to have withstood the pounding from the waves.

Since then I have amassed quite a collection. Their beaks are so beautifully 'fit for purpose' and vary in size from the staggering spear pointed gannet beak, 11 cm long, to the dainty foraging blackbird's, 2 cm long.



Guillemot skull © Sue Cockayne

When we spend our holidays in Shetland, we find seashores are obviously good hunting grounds. Road kills and garden casualties are other sources.

Also friends and family bring trophies from their travels in mysterious little boxes. "I brought a present back for you" has a whole new meaning!

Identification is easy, if they are still in feather. Otherwise, knowing where they were discovered is a clue. Referring to a valuable little book, "Tracks and Signs", which has drawings of skulls, usually provides identification (ISBN 0-7136-5208-X).

The hobby has lead to our unusual email address, which raises a few eyebrows, cockayne@bonecollectors.co.uk. Our Shetland family have nicknamed John and I, B.B.C. and P.B.C - Big and Peerie Bone Collectors!

David Gains writes: Did you know the covering on a bird's bill, the rhamphothica, is constantly being worn away and replaced, just like our fingernails. Also, some birds, like the Great Tit, shape their bills differently at different times of the year; shorter and stubbier in winter for eating seeds, thinner for insects in the summer.

A GROUSE ON A FENCE

'Twas a hot summer's day and before going to see the Black Grouse we made a detour to a "hidden valley" (Grid Ref. SH815453), which is only a short distance from the road to Ysbyty Ifan, Snowdonia.

We alighted from the car, donned walking gear and set off through a farmer's gate, whereupon a well-trodden path in the meadow dispensed with the need for the map. At the end of the trail, however, our way was barred by a newly erected wire-mesh fence topped with barbed-wire, so we walked back alongside the fence until we found a large, moss-covered stone next to a fence post. An obvious point to climb over...

My friend, Chris, climbed swiftly over the fence, so I followed. Standing upon the stone, I lifted my left leg over the barbed-wire but, as I leaned over the fence, my right foot slipped on the moss, off the stone and vanished underneath the bottom of the fence. The sky was a beautiful blue but this didn't lessen my discomfort; I was laid awkwardly on my backside, left calf impaled on barbed-wire about 3 feet above my head and starting to realise that this farmer had a grudge against short-legged people. Despite my best attempts, I could not lift my leg higher to free it from the barbs, nor could I stand up. Meanwhile, Chris was practically wetting himself with laughter...

Eventually, we both regained our composure and were reunited on the other side of the fence. "Now, the hidden valley can't be far and there should be a footbridge across it", he said. And it wasn't! Parting the bracken in which we

were standing, an abyss was revealed with Afon Conwy raging in the bottom. With feigned reluctance we retraced our steps over the fence.

"Just look at that", proclaimed Chris, for no more than 10 yards further along the fence, but out of sight earlier, there was the way-marked gate we were looking for.

On the other side of the chasm, we sat down for refreshments and I, quite literally, licked my bleeding wounds. After a while we noticed Swallows hawking for insects in front of us - in fact, they were flying above the canopy of the trees that were growing out of the crags of the gorge.

Rested, we returned to the car, this time via a different path that was somehow much clearer one way than the other! As we headed for the Black Grouse view point, we paused to watch a magnificent male Hen Harrier gracefully and effortlessly quartering the Migneint bog, before it disappeared over a ridge near Llyn Conwy.

Once parked by Llyn Dubach, we climbed through the disused quarry, situated on the flanks of Y Garnedd, to a position overlooking a natural amphitheatre where Black Grouse had been seen recently.

We sat down to have some lunch and wait for the Black Grouse to put in an appearance, but no sooner had we done so than clouds rolled over the hills towards us. Disbelievably, we watched. Within just a couple of minutes the cloud base was beneath us, visibility was down to a few yards and we were caught trying to

pull on our cagoules while holding sandwiches in our hands. The irony did not escape us and we were both practically wetting ourselves with laughter.

After about half an hour it was obvious the rain was set in for the day, so we abandoned the search for Black Grouse. My elusive Black Grouse...

A RARE ENCOUNTER

It's mid-April and we've not yet seen a ring ouzel this year. We decide to head for our usual spot to find them and park at Cutthroat Bridge. By 8.30 we are setting off along the track towards Moscar House. We've not gone far when we hear some ouzels calling and soon find a pair off to our right. We have good views of both birds, and despite such early success in our quest, we might as well carry on and see if the Great Grey Shrike is still around. It's been around for a few weeks now. We can see the twitchers' cars where the Strines road meets the A57. The unimproved fields between us and the main road are busy as usual with a few dozen Lapwings making their presence felt. There seem to be quite a few Snipes calling – maybe as many as 10 – but far fewer Curlews than we expected. Meadow Pipits are everywhere and we think there are more Red Grouse than usual. By the time we reach the Strines road we've heard several Willow Warblers and find our first Wheatear of the year just as we reach the road. We head for the twitchers who report no sign of any shrike. Despite the busy A57, we decide to go back to the car that way and meet a couple of chaps with massive telephoto lenses on the way. It seems the shrike is still around today but hasn't been seen for some time. We decide

to drink our flask of coffee and climb down off the road to sit by the stone wall on the Moscar side – well below the noisy traffic. It's warm and still and almost possible to drop off to sleep! Just then we experienced one of those magic bird-watching moments!



Great Grey Shrike © Alan Kydd

The shrike flew by us and landed on a hawthorn bush just a few yards away. It scuttled into the bush and started pulling at what looked like a bit of grey sheep wool – but how did that get so deep inside the bush? Then it dawns on us what we are watching. Here is a Great Grey Shrike extracting a mouse or vole from its larder! It didn't take long and soon took off with its prize – towards the telephoto lenses.

CALVER WEIR RESTORATION

Restoration work has now started – see details of the project at www.calverweir.org.uk.

HOPE VALLEY BIRD REPORT

During 2008 a total of 107 birds were reported within our recording area, one less than in 2009 when there were 108.

2008 Summary

Mandarin ducks were found away from their long term stronghold between Grindleford and Froggatt on a regular basis this year. They were seen in most months between Hathersage and Bamford and ducklings were reported a few times in



Mandarin Duck © Alan Kydd

this area, implying that they bred there this year. Lesser Redpolls were recorded regularly during the first half of the year, much more frequently than in the last few years. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were seen and heard in March and May near Hathersage. A Tree Sparrow was on a feeder in Froggatt in March – the only record this year. The Tuesday walks yielded a Black Redstart in the Burbage valley in April, and a reeling Grasshopper Warbler near Fox House in May. Grey Partridges were heard calling in April and June and a Red-legged Partridge was found near Hathersage in May. Red-breasted Mergansers were on the Derwent in February, March and April but probably didn't breed this year as that was the last we saw of them. Goosanders probably did

better as they were present from January until at least October. Crossbills were recorded in small flocks in May and June and then again in August. A Hoopoe was reported in Curbar during May. An Oystercatcher was an unusual flyover at Hope also in May. A Little Grebe with young was on the Derwent at Froggatt in June. A Red Kite was in the valley in May and June with an Osprey over Hathersage in June and over Bradwell in October. Woodcocks were recorded at Froggatt and Grindleford during June. A Hobby was hawking over Hathersage in August. In September there was a large influx of Honey Buzzards into the UK from Scandinavia and one was spotted over Hathersage on 28th. A total of 17 birds were reported in Derbyshire during the 2nd half of that month. In October a Barn Owl was seen at Hathersage in the early hours one morning – a rare sighting! There was only one record of a Peregrine this year –



Red-breasted Merganser © Alan Kydd

in October at Hathersage. In November and December we had Pink-footed Geese over in significant numbers. We also had records of single Waxwings in Hathersage and Bamford in both months.

2009 Summary

The Mandarins were around for a second year in the Hathersage area, and a female with 13 young was recorded within a few hundred yards of the village centre in July. Once again there seemed to be more Lesser Redpolls and they were reported every month until June. A couple of Common (Mealy) Redpolls were recorded in Froggatt in January. Later in the year, we heard that these had also visited the feeders at Longshaw. Single Goshawks were spotted over Froggatt in March and Hathersage in April.

Grey Partridges were heard in February but then there were no further reports until August and September. We had no records at all of Red-legged Partridge this year. Red-breasted Mergansers were



Little Grebe © Alan Kydd

reported every month between February and May. Once again Goosanders were more common and were seen in most months between February and September and then once more in December. An Osprey was reported over the valley in April and there was a Peregrine and a Hobby over in August. Once again one of the Loch Garten Osprey chicks flew over the valley this year on its first migration. This one roosted at Strines for one night

before flying over us on its trip to West Africa. The same bird was reported flying over central Birmingham! A Rose-coloured Starling was at Curbar in May and Ring-necked Parakeets were reported there in October. Up to 6 Dotterel were on Stanage Edge for 4 days in May. Little



Dotterel © Jon Lowes

Grebes were recorded several times in the spring and late summer around Froggatt and also at Leadmill. A Willow Tit was found in Coombsdale during August, our first record for several years. Woodcocks were found around Hathersage in April and November and at Longshaw in July. A Common Crane flew across the Edale valley in October. Up to a dozen Crossbills were around Longshaw in both November and December. Once again there were wintering Blackcaps in Hathersage gardens in December.

We are trying to keep a monthly record of birds seen in the valley now so your sightings are really needed – ring me on 01433 650864 if you see anything of note. Details can be found on our web site www.hvbc.org.uk – give it a try! All our magazines to date can be found there together with many trip reports. You can even register your sightings there so that everyone can see them.

CLUB MEMBERS

Audrey Buxton	Pat Jackson	Chris Senior
Gary Carter	Alan Kydd	Brenda Senior
Sally Carter	Di Kydd	Cedric Skelton
Richard Clemons	Chris Lorch	Carol Skelton
Marion Clemons	Rob Lorch	Ken Slack
Sue Cockayne	Jennifer Marshall	Jean Slack
Janice Connell	John Needham	Kit Stokes
Ashley Edwards	Pauline Needham	Vonny Stokes
Pam Edwards	Celia Oldridge	Terry Taylor
Tom Ferguson	John Pegler	Brenda Taylor
Angela Ferguson	Helen Perkins	John Thompson
David Gains	Rodney Pollitt	Barrie Wilkinson
Graham Games	Joan Pollitt	John Wooddisse
Pam Games	Ann Ralston	Barbara Wooddisse
David Hughes	Jane Ralston	
Marika Hughes	Simon Rowlands	
John Jackson	Graham Sedgewick	

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

President:	John Wooddisse	Ordinary members:	Tom Ferguson
Chairman:	Kit Stokes		David Gains
Secretary:	Barbara Wooddisse		Alan Kydd
Treasurer:	Graham Games		Chris Lorch

PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

If you are not a club member and would be interested in joining us, please contact John Wooddisse on 01433 650606 or Graham Games on 0114 2361320. You can also contact us via our web site – www.hvbwc.org.uk. Annual membership runs from January each year and is currently £8 per person.

Answers to the Bird Brain Quiz
1. Long-tailed duck. 2. True. 3. Moorhen. 4. New Zealand. 5. Tawny & Little. 6. True about 5g.. 7. Blackcap. 8. True – their feet are set too far back. 9. True. 10. Curlew. 11. True. 12. Eider. 13. False – it was 1871. 14. It once predated free-range fowl. 15. Short-eared owl. 16. Between 3 and 4. 17. False it was 1955. 18. Goosander. 19. Reed Warbler. 20. 30 to 40 hours. Scores: 0-2=Oh dear! 3-7=Good. 8-12=Very Good. 13-17=Excellent. 18-20=Who are you kidding!