



ISSUE 7  
2016

# THE DIPPER

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HOPE VALLEY BIRD WATCHERS CLUB



# INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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<b>President's Message</b> <i>By John Wooddisse</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>St Kilda</b> <i>By David and Elaine Lockwood</i>	<b>14</b>
<b>Bird Ringing</b> <i>By Alan Kydd</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>Our Bird Boxes</b> <i>By Alan Kydd</i>	<b>16</b>
<b>A Goshawk in Grindleford</b> <i>By Ellie Wood</i>	<b>5</b>	<b>New Boy Lives in Hope</b> <i>By John Ellicock</i>	<b>18</b>
<b>Hen Harrier Persecution-Protest Days</b> <i>By Doug Aston</i>	<b>6</b>	<b>Immersed in Bavaria</b> <i>By David Gains</i>	<b>19</b>
<b>The Coal Tit</b> <i>By John Wooddisse</i>	<b>8</b>	<b>Bird Quiz</b> <i>By Di Kydd</i>	<b>21</b>
<b>The Birds they are a-changing</b> <i>By John Wooddisse</i>	<b>8</b>	<b>Hope Valley Bird Report</b> <i>By Alan Kydd</i>	<b>22</b>
<b>Wall Brown Butterfly</b> <i>By Doug Aston</i>	<b>9</b>	<b>Club Members</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>The Evolution of a Birdwatcher</b> <i>By Alison Wheeler</i>	<b>11</b>	<b>Committee Members</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>An Unwelcome Visitor</b> <i>By Chris Lorch</i>	<b>13</b>	<b>Quiz Answers</b>	<b>24</b>

*Once again, I would like to thank all of our members and guest contributors who have written articles or provided photographs for this issue. As usual we have a mixture of topics but this issue contains a few more serious articles related to conservation issues. The small items with web site links on pages 10,13 and 15 were provided by Julia Smith, a prospective club member. A special thank you to David Gains who has once more proofread this edition. As ever any mistakes he fails to spot will all be mine!*  
AWK

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Front Cover Photograph: Red Kite © Alan Kydd These superb raptors are beginning to be seen over the valley more and more frequently. This photo was taken on the club trip to mid-Wales in May 2015, where those present enjoyed the amazing sight of literally hundreds of kites coming to the feeding station at Gigrin Farm. We had a hide to ourselves and we weren't disappointed! Maybe soon, these magnificent birds will start breeding nearby, maybe even in the valley!



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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Welcome to the seventh biennial edition of the Hope Valley Bird Watchers Club Magazine. Thank you all again who have written articles for this edition and, in particular, thanks to Alan Kydd, our hard working magazine editor and club chairman.

This year, 2016, is the 26th anniversary of the bird club and despite the advancing years of some members, we are still a very active club with 30 birdwatching walks and reserve visits each year.

For the past two years we have started having two weekend visits to reserves (mostly coastal) with an overnight stop, and have so far been to Anglesey, North Norfolk, Mid-Wales and the Lincolnshire coast. All these have been well attended and we have seen many new birds not found in Derbyshire.

Approximately twenty years ago our Bird Club had an annual visit to Mid Wales to see amongst others Red Kite, Buzzard, Raven

and Peregrine. There are now increasingly regular reports of Red Kite in the Peak District. Raven and Buzzard are frequent sights and Peregrine are nesting in nearby cathedrals and quarries; how times have changed.

Since the last issue of our magazine we have lost another club member. Garry Carter had been a member for many years and lost a long battle with cancer last year. It was Gary who arranged with Patrick Taylor for our bird boxes to be installed on Sickleholme Golf Course. He was a regular on our Tuesday evening walks and his sunny smile will be sadly missed.

Finally, I would like to thank all of the committee members for helping to keep the club running smoothly over the past year and to wish all club members successful birding in 2016.

# BIRD RINGING

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Back in 2010, David Gains wrote an interesting article for the 4<sup>th</sup> Issue of this magazine about the Nest Record Scheme (NRS) run by the BTO. You can still read the article on our web site under the magazine menu entry where all our previous editions can be found. It recalled the days of my childhood in the 1950's. Back then I lived on Tyneside, and did a spot of nesting. I had a small collection of eggs well hidden from my mother wrapped in cotton wool in a cardboard box in the roof of our wash-house at the end of our back yard. Quite rightly, she didn't approve! David's article stirred me to make efforts to find and record nests for this scheme. After a while I decided I needed some help so booked on a course run by the BTO to provide much needed expertise in finding and monitoring nests without disturbing the birds. I booked on a course in

2012, which was run over two days on a farm in Cheshire.

Over the next year or so, I managed to find more nests and then started to toy with the idea of bird ringing. It seemed to me that on finding a nest with young at an appropriate stage, it would be relatively straightforward to ring the nestlings at the same time. In 2014, I approached a Sheffield based ringing group, Sorby Breck, and was taken under the wing of a very experienced ringer (Geoff Mawson), who agreed to train me. My training started in April 2014, when I attended a ringing session at Fairholmes car park. The group regularly set up two mist nets by the feeders there. On my first visit, I was given a bird to release after it had been processed. I ringed my first nestlings at Williamthorpe in May when Geoff removed the contents of a Blue Tit box. Another trainee and I ringed them, after

which Geoff returned them to their box, none the worse for their first outing. I later discovered that the other trainee was the lady who was running the Wader Recovery Project for Peak Park, but that's another story. During the rest of that spring, Geoff and I ringed quite a few of the tit boxes the club had set up in the valley, together with a box of Pied Flycatchers and over 40 Swallow nestlings. I did not prove to be the quickest learner, and it was another 18 months before I obtained my license. This is a restricted license known as a pullus endorsement and can be achieved rather quicker than a license to catch and ring adult birds. Ringing nestlings is a much simpler process. First of all you don't have to catch them! As they cannot fly, they can't escape accidentally while you are processing



Brambling © Alan Kydd

them and ageing isn't a big problem! The data recorded when ringing adult birds are much more comprehensive. Apart from age and sex, wing length and weight are also required. Depending on the time of year, status of moult, fat levels and plumage details may also be recorded. In my second season's training we ringed a brood of Kestrels and 3 broods of Nuthatches, in addition to some of the tits and another brood of flycatchers. I always used to think that bird ringing was mainly done to find out about the travels of

migrating birds, but I now know there is much more to it. It had occurred to me that with the introduction of ever smaller tracking devices, maybe bird ringing is no longer so necessary. Such things have told us more in a couple of years about migration of species such as Cuckoo and Osprey than ringing has over dozens of years. However, I now understand that bird ringing plays a key role in monitoring the status of our bird populations. Bird numbers depend on two key factors. Firstly, the productivity of the nests - how many birds fledge and secondly, the survival rate thereafter. Bird ringing and nest monitoring together with surveys like the Breeding Bird Survey, provide crucial information about such things. It is these activities, which provide factual data about population change. Severe declines like those in our farmland birds can be recognised, the reasons better understood, and hopefully action plans developed to reverse bad situations.

On a more personal note, I have learned a whole lot more about our birds when ringing. Every species seems to have different criteria which determine age and sex and a bird in the hand looks very different from a bird seen through binoculars!



Kestrel Chick © Alan Kydd

# A GOSHAWK IN GRINDLEFORD

On the 2nd of January 2015 my neighbour Barbara came round to tell me that a Goshawk had taken up residence in their garden. It had killed a Mallard and dragged it under some tall bushes in a corner. The first thing I saw when I arrived was a large pile of feathers and then spotted the Goshawk holding the Mallard with one of its talons while it dismembered it. The Mallard would literally have been a sitting duck as we have the river Derwent at the bottom of our gardens and the ducks come up to graze on our lawns. The Goshawk didn't seem bothered by my presence and I was able to get quite close and noticed that one of its eyes was badly damaged, this being confirmed by Barbara's husband Nick.

I rang John Wooddisse the next morning and he said he would like to see it, but was rather busy and would pop round the next day. Five minutes later the phone rang and he said he was on his way! He said that it was a tiercel, a young male Goshawk probably about a year old. He had a quiet laugh when he saw my neighbours' rather elderly pet white duck which had been confined to its duck house which they had covered with chicken wire to keep it safe. It was standing in the doorway of its house watching the Goshawk and trembling visibly.

The Goshawk continued to feed on the Mallard for several days but on the 9th of January when no-one was around, it managed to pull the chicken wire away from the duck house and kill the elderly white duck. On this occasion its prey was taken from it, as no-one wanted to see the poor duck torn apart.

The following day as I drew my bedroom curtains back in the morning, I suddenly saw the Goshawk flash across our garden into the hen run of our neighbours on the other side. By the time anyone could get there, it was too late, as it had killed one of the hens and was standing over it daring anyone to interfere.

The other hens were made safe and the dead hen taken from the Goshawk as it was unfortunately the pet of one of the little girls who live there.

After this, having had 2 lots of prey being taken away from it, the Goshawk flew off and we didn't expect to see it again. However on the 3rd of March, Barbara was pruning some bushes in her garden and suddenly saw the body of the Goshawk lying head down in the bushes. I rang Alan to see if this should be reported and on his advice Nick rang The Wildlife Crime Unit. They came a couple of days later and after interviewing my neighbours and looking at some photos Nick had taken of it, they took the Goshawk away. They later informed Nick that they would be taking no further action.



That Goshawk! © John Wooddisse

# HEN HARRIER PERSECUTION - PROTEST DAYS

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This is a brief account of the Hen Harrier Days, which were meetings organised by Birders Against Wildlife Crime (BAWC) and others. The meetings were held in 2014 and 2015 to protest about the persecution of Hen Harriers.



Male Hen Harrier © Paul Gale

## **10th August 2014—Fairholmes**

This was the first day when protest meetings were held. Four were organised, each in a different part of the country; in Lancashire (the Forest of Bowland), in Northumberland (South Tyne Trail at Lambley), at Radipole RSPB reserve in Dorset and in the Peak District (Fairholmes).

I didn't count, but apparently 570 of us gathered in the Fairholmes car park area, and then moved to the grass area beneath the Derwent reservoir dam wall. The rain was torrential, and being beneath the dam wall made me a bit nervous at first, but it wouldn't have mattered if the dam wall had cracked, because the rain was so heavy that we were all completely saturated anyway.

I think the idea for the protest meetings originated with BAWC. I'm always a bit wary of groups with names which sound like they might have a very narrow agenda, for fear of them being fanatical. However, according to Mark Avery's blog, Hen Harrier Day 2014

was also supported by: the RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, the National Trust, the Hawk and Owl Trust, the League Against Cruel Sports, the Peak District National Park, *Birdwatch* magazine, Rare Bird Alert, Welsh Ornithological Society and Quaker Concern for Animals, so I thought it might be worth going.

The main speaker turned out to be Chris Packham. Chris told us how Hen Harriers were on the verge of extinction in England (which I knew) and perhaps more to the point, **why** he thought they were on the verge of extinction (again which I knew, or I wouldn't have been there in the first place). He told us how many Hen Harriers had nested in England and been successful (which I knew) and how many had tried to nest, and been unsuccessful (again, which I knew). All of this with the rain pouring off the end of his nose.

So, if we all knew what Chris was telling us, what was new? What was new was that this was a co-ordinated response to the persecution of Hen Harriers. For several years, I've been telling my wife about Hen Harriers that have mysteriously disappeared, and she's always been sympathetic, but it doesn't seem to have made any difference to the situation. Perhaps protest meetings would cause things to change.

## **9th August 2015—Govtsclough Quarry**

One year later, the second protest meetings took place. The nearest one for me was at a quarry in the Goyt Valley. It seemed an unusual choice of venue, but according to The Hawk and Owl Trust,

*'This Valley...in 1997, was the site of the Peak District's first successful Hen Harrier nest in 125 years. Also, in 2011, a breeding attempt there failed, when a female and eggs were either predated, or killed/destroyed.'*

For many people, the quarry would have been



more difficult to find than the visitors' centre at Fairholmes, but it was a symbolic choice, and this time the weather was much kinder.



Female Hen Harrier © Paul Gale

At the time, I wondered why fewer people had turned out, until I was told that more events had been organised, six or seven, whereas in 2014, there had been only four.

I think the number of organisations that had come out in support might have grown as well, and this time there were speeches from representatives of RSPB and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust. Some time before the meeting, Mark Avery had started a petition calling for an end to driven grouse-shooting; because the consensus of opinion had become that it is on grouse moors where most persecution of Hen Harriers is taking place, so it was no surprise when Mark pointed out someone in the crowd, from the Moorland Association. It may be unlikely that any such petition will be successful in my lifetime, but it could be a sign of a growing movement with a common purpose. Instead of me telling my wife about the persecution of Hen Harriers, I now know

that there are other people who are similarly concerned, and we now have access to breeding data via the internet. Telling us that there is no evidence for such persecution, isn't quite so easy now. No doubt Mark Avery's petition has come about as the result of frustration, since it can be said that in spite of assurances, there has been no improvement whatsoever in the fortunes of Hen Harriers in England.

Mark Avery also spoke again at the meeting, as did Chris Packham, and anyone interested can find Chris Packham's speech on 'Youtube'. I've never been able to watch any of the 'watch' programs on television because I find the presenters a bit irritating, but since seeing and hearing Chris's commitment, he has really risen in my estimation.

In response to the support given by the RSPB to the Hen Harrier Persecution protests, a 'retaliatory' group, called 'You Forgot about The Birds' has been formed, apparently led by Ian Botham, (Ian owns a grouse moor). YFTB appears to have a single aim, to 'any-way-it-can' discredit the RSPB, and perhaps cost it financially by damaging its membership. From what I've read so far, the main supporters of YFTB seem to have very strong connections with the shooting industry, which is what you might expect, given the circumstances. Some of the 'facts' on the YFTB website are taken from a Mail on Sunday article, editor Paul Dacre, and according to the magazine Tattler, Paul owns 18000 acres near Ullapool in Scotland.

There's also a detailed response on the RSPB website which deals with each of YFTB's

Finally, here are a few links which I found interesting. (more can be found on page 23)

Hen harrier disappearances. An article by Patrick Barkham (2015)

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jan/13/-sp-mystery-of-the-missing-hen-harriers>

Hen harriers 'being wiped out' in England by persecution. (from 2012)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-18064096>

Hen Harriers Face Extinction in England and Wales. (from 2013)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23627737>

## THE COAL TIT

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Although not as common a bird as the Blue Tit or Great Tit, the hyper-active little Coal Tit is a frequent visitor to our bird table, but it is its behaviour that makes it most interesting. They are slightly smaller than the Blue Tit with a relatively large head, shorter tail and longer bill. They stand out from the other black-headed tits by having a large white patch on their nape.



Coal Tit © Alison Wheeler

These busy little birds have a loud cheerful “wee-chee, wee-chee, wee-chee” call frequently heard in the woods around Hathersage. They have a preference for feeding on conifer seeds when available. The name Coal Tit, may refer to their sooty black-capped head, looking as if they have just come out of a coal scuttle.

In spring, their nestlings are fed on insects whereas in winter, they compete with other species at the bird table. They appear not to feed like other tits and finches but constantly carry seeds and nuts away and stash them in almost any crevice, plant stem, nook or cranny available. Why is this behaviour so different from other birds table birds that feed on the spot? Could it be that they have a ‘cunning plan’ hiding food away to be used in cold winter months when food is less available. With the exception of the Nuthatch, which will take several seeds away at once, Coal Tits unwittingly provide food for other birds that can be seen searching for hidden food around our gardens in very cold weather. Do Coal Tits remember where they have put their hidden away larder? We need to keep watching these little birds to find out!

## THE BIRDS THEY ARE A-CHANGING

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I have lived in Hathersage since 1960, and from a boy I have always been interested in birds. Later I spent over 20 years as a ringer at our local sewage works getting to know our local birds. Over the years there have been winners and losers in our bird population as you would expect with the world’s changing environment. In general, smaller species seem to have lost out whereas larger ones have been the winners.

Small songbird species have been affected by the increasing use of pesticides, new farming practices and loss of habitat caused by

human population increases. Our migrating songbirds have lost out because of the southern spread of the Sahara desert into their wintering quarters, which are already changing with the spread of the human population in Africa.

When we first came to Hathersage, there were sometimes Yellow Wagtails and Meadow Pipits on our lawn in the spring, and occasionally a Cuckoo nearby. In the meadows down by the river, Skylarks and Grey Partridges were common. Nightingales were easy to find in Clumber Park.



Some large new birds arriving in our country during the past decade have perhaps been helped by 'global warming'. These include Little Egret, Marsh Harrier, Osprey, Avocet and Mediterranean Gull. Birds of prey in the Peak District have always had a particularly turbulent time. Some gamekeepers seem to have been told to 'remove' any bird with a hooked beak, therefore restricting the natural spread of some species. In Mid Wales this last year, we saw over 300 Red Kites at a feeding station. In time, these birds will spread to most parts of the country except perhaps the grouse moors.

Where have all the Starlings gone is another puzzle. These birds used to descend 'mob-handed' onto our bird tables last century, but are now quite scarce in the Hope Valley. Sheffield city centre and warm industrial buildings like steelworks were crowded in winter with roosting Starlings. These birds were mostly east-west migrants, wintering in warm Western Europe, but breeding in Eastern Europe, well into Russia. Their

breeding numbers have decreased as a result of human population growth, industrialisation and the increased use of pesticides in farming. We now have a decreasing population of Starlings that are adversely affected by the lack of nesting sites in chimney pots, plastic barge boards, etc. Swifts and Swallows are also decreasing due to lack of suitable nesting sites. These birds travel thousands of miles from their wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa. We can help them by providing more artificial nesting sites. We help birds by providing food at bird tables in winter. This has helped the Goldfinch population to increase by 108% in the last 20 years.

Looking to the future, I am sure there will be more changes in bird populations despite the increase of urbanisation and global warming. Wildlife conservation organisations are spreading in this country and throughout the world and people are more aware of strategies aimed at helping in the protection of bird and other animal species.

## WALL BROWN BUTTERFLY

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I've been interested in butterflies and moths all my life. Thirty five years ago, I lived and worked in Greece, teaching English as a foreign Language. Where I lived (Komotini in Thrace, not far from the Turkish border) was good for birds, moths and butterflies.

We had a typical Greek apartment with double doors which led out on to balconies, and the first thing I did when I got there was to replace one of the deliberately dim balcony bulbs with the biggest wattage bulb I could find (as I recall, it was 500 watt, but it might have been a bit less). It lit the whole street, and since there were only a couple of roads with street lights, there wasn't much competition for insects attracted to light. We had a room that we didn't use, in which the walls were painted white, so at night I'd open

the balcony doors and turn the light on. In the morning I'd very quietly go into my giant moth trap to see what I'd got. I had to stop doing it though, because after a few weeks, the whole building was crawling with wildlife, which I thought was brilliant, but other residents were not so keen.

Anyway, the point is that I'm interested in insects as well as birds, so I occasionally send reports of butterfly sightings, if I think they're worth knowing about, to Ken Orpe. Ken co-ordinates the monitoring of butterflies throughout Derbyshire. In September 2015, he sent me an email suggesting that I might have a look at a bank (of the grassy kind) in the dale below where I live in Middleton-by-Youlgreave,. He'd been told that Wall Brown had been seen there by

someone he knew, so I picked a sunny day, and went to have a look. I already knew the bank; it's always been good for butterflies because it's west-facing, sheltered and quite steep, so not much good for cultivation. I'd seen a Clouded Yellow there about 30 years ago, and it has always been good for Peacock and Red Admiral, but I wanted Wall Brown. The sun was hot and after climbing the steep bank, I sat surrounded by butterflies, so many in fact, that it reminded me of being in the Alps. A battered Wall appeared and settled on a bare patch of limestone rock, so they were still here, and then another. I ran around photographing stuff, and finally got a Wall Brown that wasn't battered, which surprised me a bit, since they are double brooded, and this seemed to indicate a third brood.

When I got back to the house, I emailed Ken and sent him a picture of the fresh Wall, and asked if it was evidence of a third brood. He agreed that it probably was. Today, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015, Ken sent out the annual report on the status of East Midlands butterflies, and this was the part relevant to the Wall Brown;

*“whilst the latter species (referring to Wall) has suffered an 87% loss in abundance and a 77% decline in occurrence during the same period. (since 1976)”*

*“However, it is not easy to try and help the future of the **Wall Brown** as the main causes of its demise are not yet fully understood.*

*We are at least fortunate in still having small colonies so we can record their existence in the County, mainly in the higher parts of the Peak District which seems to suggest that the butterfly is seeking a more temperate climate these days. Other suggestions for its decline include the fact that too much nitrogen in the soil could be affecting the quality of the grass that the caterpillars need to feed on, and also a third ‘suicidal’ brood in October each year doesn’t help the butterfly as they are mainly males that emerge and they are unlikely to find a female in time and thus complete their mating so as to produce the spring brood during the following year.”*

The picture below is the fresh Wall that I photographed...it's a male, of course.



Wall Brown © Doug Aston

## GROUNDING BATS

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If you find a grounded bat PLEASE don't leave it where it is, thinking "nature will take its course". It will - but it'll take several days to do it, and meanwhile the bat can fall prey to predation, injuries become infected, they can become fly-struck, or other horrors overtake them. For all their tiny size they're tough little beasts and take a long time to die. Scoop them up in a cloth or wear gloves, put them in an escape-proof box and phone 0345 1300 228 (Derbyshire Bat Conservation Group)

<http://www.derbyshirebats.org.uk/contact.php>

# THE EVOLUTION OF A BIRDWATCHER

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Some ten years ago I was at a friend's house whilst they and their teenage daughter discussed an impending party she was hoping to host. The daughter in question lost some of her enthusiasm when she realised that her parents did not intend to vacate the house whilst the party was in motion. Initially, this was a total deal breaker for the daughter until she realised that her parents were not going to budge, and she grudgingly acknowledged that it would be okay for them to remain on the lower floor of their 3 storey house whilst the party was in full swing on the 2 floors above. There was only one condition from the daughter: "If you have reason to speak to any of my friends, do not under any circumstances let them know you are bird watchers"!

That made me laugh, a lot! I understood her worry, at a time in life when you're trying to be your coolest, you probably wouldn't want to be associated with bird watchers, would you? But here I am, a member of a birdwatching group no less, and I'm finding it harder and harder to go out of the house without a pair of binoculars, so what has happened? Well, thinking about it, I realise I was always a bit of a closet birdwatcher because I come from a family of bird feeders and when I was a girl, all scraps were carefully kept (I recall bacon rind in particular) and fed to the birds, though I don't remember any bird feeders in those days. Back then, I remember Starlings were seen as unwelcome takers of the food though I'm not sure why, but perhaps because they were a bit bigger and bossier and came in numbers. I also remember my father identifying birds to us on country walks, some of which stuck, but sadly I did not retain much to help me now.

Once I had my own place, I continued the family culture of feeding birds and I notice

both my brothers do too, so the family tradition has continued down all lines. At first 'my' birds just ate the food almost unwatched, and sometimes it would run out and I wouldn't replace it for ages. But gradually it crept up on me, and feeding the birds became as much part of the routine as feeding the children! Indeed, although I would not yet have technically considered myself a 'birdwatcher', my own daughters were heard to moan "Not again, you say that every day", when I announced the arrival of the woodpecker on the nuts!



Long-tailed Tit © Alison Wheeler

But of course it's more than a family tradition because what finally tipped me over the edge into becoming an 'out' bird watcher, is that there is so much joy to be had from these wonderful wild animals, so elusive and yet so close to us wherever we are. Really it's just something you have to get fully into, isn't it? The joyous memories that birds have given to me cover the length and breadth of the country: I remember hearing a Blackbird singing in a tree as I got off the train in the depths of winter at dusk in Wick, Scotland, just south of John O'Groats; and then seeing a tiny Goldcrest just 2 or 3 feet away in the hedge behind my holiday caravan in Cornwall

last October whilst I sat in motionless wonder looking out through the window. But the great thing is you don't need to travel at all. One of the highlights of my life was watching the Starling murmuration above Stoney Middleton. I stood there in absolute awe thinking that I was beyond privileged to be seeing something so amazing, so perfect and seemingly so impossible. Anyone who has seen it knows that I can't put it into words so I won't try further. To think that Starlings had been disparaged when my parents used to feed the birds!

So I'll finish these musings with a few of my other fondest memories of birds and to be honest, it centres on my birds that come to my garden or the area immediately surrounding it. I have my favourites, for example, my heart sings when the Swallows return to nest in the stable and I know that will be the case till the day I die. The Long-tailed Tits fill me with joy as their plump little bodies squash into the anti-squirrel cage surrounding the fat balls, almost too many at once to fit, with their tails poking out. I love to watch the Redpolls as they devour expensive sunflower hearts for what seems like hours on end, so much tamer than the bossy Great Tits, the delicately pretty Blue Tits or the little balls that are Coal Tits.

The gaudy Goldfinches first came for the niger seeds but now will only eat the (as I said expensive!) sunflower hearts. I love the House Sparrows, and Chaffinches feeding from the floor, occasionally trying their luck at getting onto a feeder but generally failing. I now recognise Bramblings that come, having been told by Dave or Alan (I forget which, but it was on an HVBWC walk!) that I

had undoubtedly seen them but probably thought they were Chaffinches! I look forward to the 3 Pheasants that are visiting me every day this winter, even though I fear I may be feeding them up for someone's table, but perhaps my three will escape? A Kestrel spends much of its time on the power lines next to our house, and a Sparrowhawk regularly causes a sudden and urgent dispersal of all birds from the feeders, giving me mixed feelings when it catches one. I see the Heron with its languid flight most days, once landing for a short spell in our garden.

I could go on and on, because there's something different and fascinating every day in every single bird that comes to my garden. And all I have to do is look out of my window!

Who wouldn't be a bird watcher?



Lesser Redpoll © Alison Wheeler

## SHAGS IN DERBYSHIRE

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As we have steadily cleared the seas of fish, we should not have been surprised when Cormorants began to appear at inland waterbodies. In December, their close relative the Shag started to appear in Derbyshire and has been recorded at Linacre Reservoirs, Carr Vale N.R. and Ogston Reservoir to name just 3. No longer can we assume that large black bird flying up the valley is a Cormorant! How long before someone confirms Shag in our recording area? AWK

# AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

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Beneath our dining room we have a cellar with a small rectangular window, which is at ground level on the outside. Last winter, whenever we went down to the cellar we could make out the shadow of a large bird right outside, although it was difficult to determine which species through the dusty cobwebs on the glass.

We soon realised that this was the male Sparrowhawk that regularly swooped past our bird table, scattering all the little birds.



Sparrowhawk © David Gains

An insulated pipe runs along the ground in front of the window, and from its sheltered perch there, it had a perfect view round the end of the hedge to the bird feeders outside the kitchen window - obviously a bird not averse to the easy life! Although we never actually saw it catch a feathery snack, we knew it would not have stayed there all day if it had been completely unsuccessful. Fewer and fewer small birds were visiting the bird table, as they decided the risk to their lives was greater than their hunger.

Finally, one day I saw red: one of the four tiny wrens that roosted every night in a bird box on the kitchen wall was being chased round and round in tight circles by the hawk, right in front of me.

Now this is one of my regular dilemmas - all creatures have to live, and in order to do so they need to eat. So what right have I to protect a 'harmless' Wren or a pretty Blue Tit from a ruthless, if handsome predator, which needs to kill small birds and rodents in order to survive? And if I do, surely I should equally be protecting the poor caterpillars and grubs that are killed by the smaller birds in order for *them* to survive? If Nature is left alone, it will always find its balance; its equilibrium. A Sparrowhawk is part of our native wildlife that ensures the population of smaller birds is kept in check. So I shouldn't interfere, should I?

But then I realised that we had already interfered a lot - boosting small bird numbers unnaturally by putting up bird boxes and providing food. And, of course, by unwittingly installing the pipe in the perfect place for the hawk to hide. So how could we put this right? I couldn't bear to stop feeding the birds, as I get so much pleasure out of seeing them. So I decided on a very simple strategy to make the odds a little less biased. I leant a board up against the window, over the pipe.

This strategy seemed to work, so I removed the board from the window during the summer. But by the end of the year, it was obvious that the bird had remembered its 'cunning plan', as it had started returning to its hidden perch. So the board is now firmly back in place.

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## LONG LASTING COLOURS

A discovery of why birds' feathers do not fade as they age could lead to long-lasting colours for us! See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-35145663>



# ST. KILDA

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This year I decided to give the Jura fell race a miss and go further north with the main goal being to visit St Kilda. We almost made it last year but whilst on Harris we discovered booking arrangements and times didn't work out. This time we were lucky, particularly as west Scotland, and especially the Outer Hebrides, had endured the worst winter and spring weather for many years.



St. Kilda Boat (Hirta) © David Lockwood

The mission was actually twofold - firstly, our annual bird count in those parts, which also proved very productive with 80+ species including additions this year of Long-tailed Skua (4 off North Uist) the Kilda Wren and nesting Wood Sandpiper on North Harris. Secondly, it has been Elaine's ambition to visit 70 islands before reaching 70 in November this year - now achieved thanks to Angus and crew and what a bonus for St Kilda to be the final one.

Our booked day on the Kilda boat was cancelled as expected due to the weather, but the obligatory standby day gave Angus, our captain, a window of opportunity he was prepared to take!

What judgement: as he predicted, the first two hours of the three hour crossing were 'exhilarating' to say the least! I'm afraid, a sailor I am not; having to resort to 'the plastic beaker' along with two others as the boat relentlessly left the water - props spinning in fresh air, before crashing back onto the next rising wave. Calmer weather did eventually arrive so for the last hour, with our destination now in sight, it was binocs. rather than 'the beaker'.

After that experience we could not have had a better day - over four hours to explore the main island of Hirta with bright sunshine and a light breeze as we respectfully strolled along the single street with its 16 houses (3 renovated). The last remaining families were evacuated in August 1930; by mutual consent. Life had become too hard to sustain in an ever modernising world so it was a sorrowful but inevitable parting from their unique way of life/existence.

St Kilda now has the unique status as the UK's only UNESCO Dual World Heritage site. The most stunning experience however was the return trip - calm seas now and a tour to and around the Island of Boreray (4 miles from Hirta) and its two adjacent sea-stacks, Stac Lee and Stac an Armin. These are absolutely awe-inspiring; to think that the Kilda menfolk used to come and live out here (for up to two weeks in makeshift cave/bothy holes) for the purpose of killing Fulmar, Puffin and Gannet doesn't bear thinking about. This was to ensure their families' survival through the long harsh winter months. Most of the routes up, around and



along ledges would definitely merit an E grade for dangerousness, and easily a minimum of 4c for making any progress due to steepness alone. They must have been super cragsmen. To land in the first place must have been 'fun' - a 5m swell is the norm; so hurling your 10 year old son onto a stac, tied to a length of homemade rope must have been pretty challenging for Dads!



Boreray © David Lockwood



Stac an Armin © David Lockwood



Stac Lee © David Lockwood

The birds: although only 28 species regular breed, over one million frequent the archipelago during the summer. The sheer number on the cliffs and in the air was overwhelming and we were lucky to hear and see the Kilda Wren (2 around the old village) - this is a larger form to those on the mainland and only found here. Few plants and wild flowers manage to survive the harsh conditions. The dominant vegetation is maritime grassland but heather, bracken, bilberry and tormentil along with various lichens and some arctic alpines have adapted to reduced growth rates due to salt spray and strong winds. Indeed an unforgettable experience!

## LINCOLNSHIRE NATURALISTS

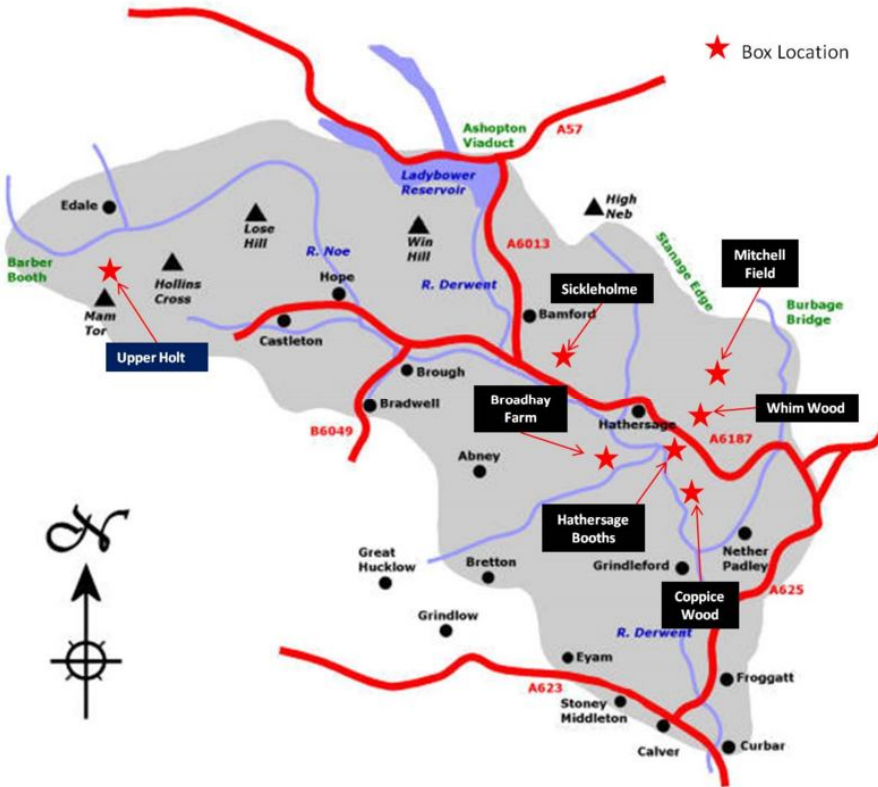
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The Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union is keen to encourage more readers to subscribe to their bulletin. If you would like to receive their eMail bulletin you can sign up for it at

<http://www.lnu.org/wildnews.php>

# OUR BIRD BOXES

In the autumn of 2013, I persuaded the club to use £50 of our funds to purchase material for some bird boxes. I offered to build the boxes and find locations for them in the valley. Vonny Stokes and Chris Lorch offered to finance material for a few larger boxes aimed at Kestrel and Tawny Owl. Over the winter of 2013/2014 I managed to build over 30 small boxes together with 2 kestrel boxes and an owl box. The boxes were installed with the help of a few other members ready for the 2014 breeding season and we had boxes in 6 locations. In addition to boxes at Vonny's (Broadhay Farm) and Chris's (Upper Holt), Gary Carter arranged for us to put boxes up at Sickleholme golf course. Longshaw allowed us to put some boxes up in Coppice Wood and we also put some at Mitchell Field Farm supported by the owner (Peter Tabern). Marion Codd arranged for a few boxes at Hathersage Booths.



The boxes were monitored and the results sent in to the B.T.O. for their Nest Recording Scheme (NRS). I was surprised at the uptake with over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of our 46 boxes occupied and  $\frac{2}{3}$  successful in fledging nestlings.

During 2014 we were approached to monitor some boxes in Whim Wood near Hathersage, and agreed to do that in 2015. A larger nest box programme was being developed at

Longshaw, so it was agreed with them that we leave our boxes for that scheme so we are no longer involved in monitoring there. At Sickleholme, we refurbished quite a few old boxes that we'd discovered on the golf course, and over the winter of 2014 built a few more boxes which were added to our sites. As a result, for the 2015 season, we monitored almost 80 boxes.

A table showing the results from the first two years of our activity is shown below. Encouragingly, the uptake in 2015 was only slightly lower than in 2014. Sadly, the outcome was considerably worse with less than ½ of the boxes being successful. This was largely due to the failure of lots of the tit boxes because of a spell of very cold and windy weather towards the end of May, when many birds struggled to feed their broods. On a brighter note, whilst we only had 4 successful bird species in our boxes in 2014, we had 6 successful species in 2015, despite the failure of the Mandarin.

In 2016, we have added more boxes and expect to monitor around 100. Marion Codd has donated an owl box which has been set up in Whim Wood. I have built a new Tree Creeper box (based on a new design) which is installed at Broadhay Farm, near the commercially built box which has been ignored for the last two years. I have not included in these figures the boxes set up on the river aimed at Dippers/Grey Wagtails. These were installed in 2015 but none were used. At one site we discovered Dippers nesting within feet of the box in what is clearly a long established natural nest site. This box has been moved to a new location for 2016.

Location	Boxes		Successful		Species	Birds Fledged	
	2014	2015	2014	2015		2014	2015
Upper Holt	6	8	4	4	Blue Tit Great Tit	18	11 4
Broadhay Farm	17	29	13	11	Blue Tit Great Tit Mandarin Pied Flycatcher Nuthatch Kestrel	43 23 9 8	26 10  8 5
Mitchell Field	5	6	4	2	Blue Tit Nuthatch	19	4 7
Coppice Wood (Longshaw)	8		2		Blue Tit Pied Flycatcher	9 4	
Sickleholme	7	14	6	5	Blue Tit Great Tit Robin Coal Tit	18 11	6 9 5 6
Hath'ge Booths	3	3	0	1	Great Tit		6
Whim Wood		19		12	Blue Tit Pied Flycatcher Nuthatch		51 7 6

# NEW BOY LIVES IN HOPE

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Well, actually I live in Hathersage. Having moved earlier this year from Hampshire where birds in our garden, particularly nesting birds, were an important feature, I come to Hathersage full of hope. And I have not been disappointed - just a few snippets: a familiar range of garden birds frequent the feeders but how nice it is to see Siskins and Linnets in far greater numbers than we ever had in the south. Several Bullfinches have been with us for prolonged periods. How wonderful it was to hear Curlews from our garden in the spring and see them feeding in an adjacent field. (and they were not even mentioned in the house particulars). A Red Kite came across the valley as I walked down from North Lees in June. Having been shot to extinction in Hampshire in Victorian times it was wonderful to see them return about 10 years ago to be a daily feature of the village sky - with no deleterious effect apparently on the game shooting. On 25 July, which happened to be my wife's birthday, I raised the blind in our bedroom and a recently fledged Barn Owl chick was perched on the window sill for 20 minutes to the delight of us all, including our visiting granddaughters - some present! We had wonderful Swift screaming parties over the house during their brief summer visit. Last month I saw a skein of geese heading down the Derwent Valley, larger than any I've seen since visiting Islay many years ago ..... enough snippets.



Longparish Kestrels © John Ellicock



And I live in hope of what? Well, they're modest hopes really: Kestrels nesting in our garden; Barn Owls nesting in a tree in the adjacent field; Swifts in particular, and also Martins, nesting on the house; Swallows nesting in our wood store; to see Hen Harriers sky dance; to see a Goshawk; to see..... modest really, and we will try to make them happen. Sometimes it works!

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## Stop Press!

Oystercatchers were heard calling over the Edale Valley one night in the first week of January 2016 - a first entry for the bird report in 2018! *Chris Lorch*

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# IMMERSED IN BAVARIA

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We went for a lengthy walk on 16 May 2014 from Benediktbeuern to Kochel am See - about 15km or 9 miles. This was the same walk as we had done the previous year (see 'Loisach Valley, Bavaria', The Dipper 2014), albeit in the opposite direction but with the same purpose - to find a Bluethroat.



Wet meadows of the Loisach Valley with Benediktenwand in background © David Gains

Weather-wise, well, it could have been better - grey cloud and rain showers with sunny intervals.

However, we were off to a good start with the birds. In a secluded reedbed area, the first bird we encountered was a Purple Heron - a first for me - and followed quickly by a pair of scolding Fieldfares, which breed in Bavaria.

Our walk continued into meadows, where we saw and heard several Yellowhammers, Redstarts, Tree Sparrows, Willow Warblers, Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs. This led us into an avenue of trees, where we encountered Nuthatches, Blackbirds and our first Cuckoo and Corncrake calls. Buzzards, a Marsh Harrier and a Black Kite were flying over.

"Let's just take a look", were Carin's words, as we approached a signpost. This was after I had already said that it wasn't worth it, because it was lifeless last year - well, except for the mosquitoes that had had an insatiable appetite for human blood. With no further ado, Carin disappeared into the area. The wooden sign at its entrance was in German only, which I translated loosely to: "Danger! Swamp. Only fools tread where angels fear to go". In spite of this stark warning, I followed...

This area is indeed a swamp area and it is criss-crossed by boardwalks constructed from half logs, fallen tree trunks and, for the more adventurous, a zip line and swinging bridge. We chose not to be too adventurous, because we had already reached our threshold for 'extreme sports'. You will recall that it had been raining, so not only were we dressed for the occasion - boots and waterproofs - but the wood was slippery. And this was not just wood, but wood covered in moss, algae and slime!

We struggled over the first 20 metres of tree trunks, laid end-to-end, with a single rickety, discontinuous hand-rail comprising tree branches. To maintain our balance and not remain rooted to the spot, we tried first to walk with our feet pointing forwards and then sideways like penguins, but neither lessened our peril.

A little further on, a rotten tree had fallen across our path, so we considered retreating, but decided nothing could be worse than what we had just experienced. We fought valiantly around the tree, through the undergrowth and overhanging branches of neighbouring trees,



back on to a boardwalk. This was not one made from planks but from small logs - a round upper surface with a gap between each log - and for added entertainment, there were no hand rails.

Eventually, we came to a step leading up from one boardwalk on to another. Carin was in front of me and had only just made it on to the step, because the logs were sloping to one side and extremely slippery, and she almost lost her footing. She offered her hand to me, which I accepted before stepping forwards.

Time came to a standstill...

Unfortunately, the Earth's gravitational pull exceeded the friction between my boots and the boardwalk and, in the blink of an eye, my right foot slid sideways, off the logs and into the swamp - up to the ankle, then the calf and finally stopping a little above the knee! Naturally, with one foot half a metre lower than the other and gravity being what it is, the left foot was in hot pursuit. Not only that, but so too was Carin, who was still holding on to my hand...

As Carin joined me in the swamp, she knocked my spectacles off, punched me in the face and landed face down in the swamp. I had landed on my side - the left leg free but the other still stuck firmly in the swamp.

Then, in a state of panic and without considering the health and wellbeing of Carin, I used her as a firm foundation to lever my right leg out of the cold, wet, utterly disgusting, squelching swamp. I was then able to straighten my glasses and, in true selfless concern, see if Carin was all right.

She was still lying face down, motionless. I asked if she was all right. No reply. I asked again and this time she replied, "I can't move". Fearing the worst, I attempted to turn her over, to discover that she couldn't move because she was laughing. She was laughing uncontrollably, barely able to breathe, never mind speak or move.

We extricated ourselves somehow from this quagmire, got back on to the perilous board walk without further incident and continued our way out of this God-forsaken place. I had a water-filled boot, wet socks and trousers, Carin had mildly damp trousers. She says I managed to find the only deep swampy patch in the whole place; I think she found the only dry spot.

On our way out, I paused briefly because I had seen a pair of Willow Tits, one of which was excavating a hole in a tree stump, just a couple of metres away from us. Carin enjoyed this close encounter very much - between recurring bouts of laughter. For some reason, I was not in the mood to take pictures.

Outside the swamp, on dry land, I removed my boots and socks, which Carin placed in the sunshine, after she had attempted to dry the boots' interiors with tissues. Meanwhile, I was scraping disgusting sludge from my knee downwards and trying to get the trousers as dry as possible - Carin wanted them off!

All the while, we watched an agitated Blackcap and Yellowhammer, before eventually realising their focus was a male Red-backed Shrike. In fact, this was the same spot we had seen a Red-backed Shrike the previous year!

As we left the shrike, Carin said "if I suggest going around there again, hit me" and I committed this to memory as we continued our walk. By now, the weather was deteriorating and the outside of my waterproofs were becoming as wet as the inside. We saw mostly water birds, such as Goldeneye, Tufted Duck, but several White Wagtails too.

On the moor to the western side of the river we could hear a couple of Curlews calling. Swallows and a few House Martins were hawking for insects over the river. There were common warblers everywhere, as well as at least one Marsh Warbler, which are great mimics.



There were also lots of wonderful wildflowers, including orchids, and several deer and a hare in the meadows.



A Military Orchid © David Gains

At the end of our walk, at Kochel am See, we had good views of a Spotted Flycatcher, before finally heading to the railway station.

In total, we recorded 46 species: Swallow, House Martin, Skylark, Pied Wagtail, Blackbird, Fieldfare, Mistle Thrush, Grasshopper Warbler, Marsh Warbler, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher, Robin, Redstart, Long-tailed Tit, Marsh Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Nuthatch, Red-Backed Shrike, Magpie, Jay, Carrion Crow, Starling, Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Goldfinch, Yellowhammer, Wood

Pigeon, Cuckoo, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Black Kite, Buzzard, Marsh Harrier, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Corncrake, Coot, Curlew, Mute Swan, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Goldeneye. Oh yes, Willow Tits and no Bluethroats.

## BIRD QUIZ

Many birds are named after people. Can you identify the species named after the following

1. Montagu	2. Baird	3. Leach	4. Marmora
5. Thekla	6. Brünnich	7. Lewin	8. Audouin
9. Nuttall	10. Harris	11. Brandt	12. Cretzchmar
13. Cory	14. Bewick	15. Montezuma	16. Eleonora
17. Lady Amherst	18. Salvin	19. Temminck	20. Steller
21. Brewer	22. Barrow	23. Forster	24. Baillon

Have a go first without looking at the list of possible answers on the back page.

If that doesn't help, the answers are also on the back page (upside down)

# HOPE VALLEY BIRD REPORT

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During 2014/2015 a total of 106/(110) birds were reported within our recording area. As usual we have been keeping a monthly record and the details can be found on our web site [www.hvbwc.org.uk](http://www.hvbwc.org.uk).

## 2014 Summary

Brambling were in the valley from January and every month up to and including April and returned for sightings in November and December. The winter continued warmer and wetter than usual. There were no reports of any Waxwings this year. Goosander were on the river all this winter and were recorded in almost every month. Continued mild weather allowed the Grey Wagtails to stay throughout the winter months too.



Grey Wagtail © Alan Kydd

The first Kingfisher was reported in February and in every month bar one until August. The first Red Kite of the year was over Longshaw in February and a bird was seen in 3 of the summer months too. A few Teal were at Calver marsh, also in February. The mild winter seems to have helped the Stonechats which were recorded every month between February and October. Common Crossbills were found in January and also in March, with 11 in Padley Gorge. Golden Plover were heard around Burbage Bridge in March. A Grasshopper Warbler was reeling on

Hathersage Moor in April. Red-legged Partridge were reported throughout the spring in the Edale valley. A Common Sandpiper was seen on the river between Calver and Froggatt in April, May and June. It was encouraging to hear Wood Warblers singing around Padley and Grindleford for 3 months this summer after a poor season in 2013.

A Little Egret was spotted flying up the valley in June and Oystercatchers were heard in both May and June. A Rose-coloured Starling visited a Curbar garden in June. There were two records of a Lesser Whitethroat in the valley this year, in May at Calver and June, at Hathersage. In June we had our only reported Hobby of the year. There was also only one Osprey recorded this year with a southbound bird following the river over Froggatt in August. A Great Grey Shrike was around Froggatt Edge in November, probably one of 3 birds reported for some weeks around the eastern moors. Overwintering Chiffchaffs are becoming more likely these days and no less than 3 were near the river between Froggatt and Calver in December. A Short-Eared owl was in the Burbage valley in December. The winter started very mild and the Met. Office reported that 2014 was the warmest since records began. It finished with heavy snow on Boxing Day which remained until the end of the year.

## 2015 Summary

January started cold with very strong winds, but the winter was apparently the sunniest for over 20 years. Brambling, together with winter thrushes were around until the end of February but were thin on the ground thereafter. A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, the first since 2012, was found between Hathersage and Grindleford in January. Lapwing and Curlew were back in the breeding areas in February. April was

unusually warm and this continued until mid-May, when very cold and strong winds caused some problems for our breeding birds. A Water Rail was at Calver marshes in April and a Greylag Goose was reported on the river in April too. There was a Garganey at Hathersage in May. Ospreys were over in April and May and a Merlin was spotted above Broadhay farm, Hathersage, in June.



Little Egret Alan Kydd

During the spring, wader surveys at Overstones Farm above Hathersage revealed that reasonable numbers of Grey Partridge were around. They were found there every month between March and June. No Peregrines were reported last year and there were only two sightings this year in May and December at Hathersage. A Lesser Whitethroat was heard near Hathersage in May. Grasshopper Warblers were heard reeling above Hathersage in both May and June.

Just like last year, the only record of a Hobby in the valley was in June. Wood Warblers were once more reported around Padley in May and June, but less frequently than in 2014. The only sighting of a Common Sandpiper was at Hathersage, in June, when the only Red Kite of the year was also spotted. A juvenile Barn Owl was a rare find at Hathersage in July.



Common Crane © Alan Kydd

A Common Crane was reported over Leadmill, Hathersage, in September. A pair of Long-eared Owls nested in the valley this year - the first confirmed for some years. A Black Redstart was in the Stanage Edge area also in September. It seems that Ring Ouzels had a good breeding season this year, with good numbers reported in late summer. A Great Crested Grebe was on the Hope Cement fishing ponds in December, the first recorded in the valley 2008.

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Report from Scottish Natural Heritage clearly states the Hen harrier is threatened with extinction as a breeding bird in Scotland (from 2011)

<http://www.snh.gov.uk/news-and-events/press-releases/press-release-details/?id=458>

Hen Harriers 'being wiped out' in England by persecution. (from 2012)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-18064096>

Hen Harriers Face Extinction in England and Wales. (from 2013)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23627737>

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Cormorant	Bunting	Hawk	Shearwater
Warbler	Swan	Gull	Quail
Eagle	Falcon	Guillemot	Gull
Lark	Albatross	Storm petrel	Pheasant
Jay	Blackbird	Crake	Honeyeater
Lark	Albatross	Storm petrel	Sandpiper

*Answers to the Bird Quiz*  
 1. Montagu's Harrier 2. Baird's Sandpiper 3. Leach's Storm Petrel  
 4. Marmora's Warbler 5. Thekla Lark 6. Brunnich's Guillemot 7. Lewin's Honeyeater  
 8. Audouin's Gull 9. Nuttall's Woodpecker 10. Harris Hawk 11. Brandt's Cormorant  
 12. Cretzschmar's Bunting 13. Cory's Shearwater 14. Bewick's Swan  
 15. Montezuma's Quail 16. Eleanora's Falcon 17. Lady Amherst's Pheasant  
 18. Salvin's Albatross 19. Temminck's Stint 20. Steller's Jay 21. Brewer's Blackbird  
 22. Barrow's Goldeneye 23. Forster's Tern 24. Baillon's Crake