



ISSUE 9
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THE DIPPER

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HOPE VALLEY BIRD WATCHERS CLUB



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Did You Know...? that there are 88 species of wren worldwide? Our Wren, the Eurasian Wren, occurs throughout Europe and in a band across Asia stretching as far as Japan. In addition to the nominate species, we have three distinct subspecies in the UK, each confined to the island/island group from which each takes its name - St. Kilda Wren, Shetland Wren and Fair Isle Wren. The scientific name, *Troglodytes troglodytes* is taken from the Greek word 'troglodytes' (from 'troggle' a hole, and 'dyein' to creep), meaning 'cave-dweller', and refers to this species' habit of foraging in nooks and crannies.

Front Cover Photograph: Whinchat © Alan Kydd The Whinchat is a summer visitor which is still hanging on as a breeding bird in the valley. This bird was holding a territory in the Burbage valley in June 2018.



Many thanks once again to all members and guest contributors who have submitted articles and photographs for this issue, and a special thank you to David Gains who has once more proof read the magazine.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the ninth biennial edition of the Hope Valley Birdwatchers' Club magazine. Thank you all again for making our club such an active one.

I would particularly like to thank Alan Kydd for guiding our club successfully into the 2020's and for editing this magazine.

This year is our 30th anniversary. It does not seem so long ago that two birdwatching classes were stopped at our local college for being 'uneducational', resulting in the club being formed. We called our first magazine 'The Dipper' as Dippers were a local speciality bird, and as sometimes we have 'dipped out' when we have missed a rare bird on one of our outings.

Alan has been putting up nest boxes for song birds and birds of prey for several years now and has recently been joined by John Ellicock and Lester Hartmann. They have created a valley wide scheme to provide and install

much needed nest boxes for Swifts and more recently have been busy installing lots of boxes for both Kestrels and Barn Owls. We are beginning to see increases in our visiting Pied Flycatchers and also the spread of Barn Owls in the valley as a result. Lester is running a business in Hathersage manufacturing nest boxes, and won the prestigious 'Best in Show' for his stand at the annual Bird Fair with his collection of innovative nest boxes.

In 2019, one of our members set out to see how many different bird species could be seen in a single year in the UK in competition with some friends. The 300 mark was almost reached, see page 10 for her story.

Finally I would like to thank you all for helping to keep the club running smoothly during the past two years and to wish you all successful birding in 2020.

BIRD QUIZ (where the answer is a bird - it is a British bird)

1. In parts of northern Britain, the name 'Corbies' is used for which type of birds?
2. Which of these four is the largest - Snipe, Lapwing, Curlew, Redshank?
3. The largest breeding colonies of Gannets in the world are found on the British Isles. True or false?
4. Which bird often flies upside down in its mating display?
5. Which bird can RUN the fastest.
6. Which bird first seen in the UK in 1956 is now the 7th most frequently seen bird in the UK?
7. The Anglo Saxon name for which bird was the Ruddock?
8. What bird did William Wordsworth address with the words 'Shall I call thee bird, or but a wandering voice'?
9. The most common bird (measured in terms of breeding pairs) is what?
10. Which of our breeding birds migrates the furthest?
11. Which species has been called 'the warden of the marshes'?
12. Which bird was a popular Victorian pet because of its twittering call?
13. Which brown bird that feeds on the edge of pools is sometimes called the 'heather bleater'?
14. Which of our owls is sometimes called the 'Screech' owl?
15. What is the collective name for a group of Ravens?
16. What are the young of herons known as?
17. Approximately how many birds are on the 'British List' 300 400 or 600?
18. Which British birds have been termed 'Mother Carey's Chickens' by sailors?
19. Which bird can be identified by its scarecrow pose when drying out after diving?
20. Which bird, common on British bird feeders has never been recorded in Ireland?

MY SECOND BEST BARN OWL

The weather forecast for the Great Longstone Rowland evening walk on May 8th 2018 was mixed. It promised, and delivered, rain at 5 pm. It also promised dry weather for the important period from six onwards, when we were due to be walking. Here, again, it was accurate. Alan Kydd was away so I arranged a lift with John Wooddisse. We arrived at the meeting point in Great Longstone early, and waited, and waited, and waited. However, no-one else turned up. Apparently they had all misguidedly been put off by the five o'clock rain.

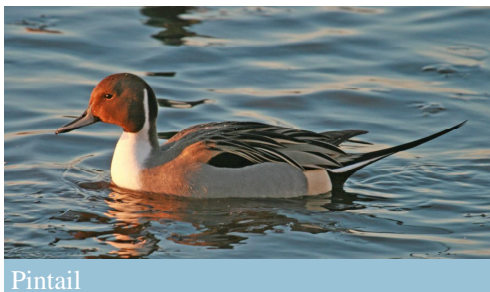


Barn Owl

The walk began well. As John was preparing himself, I scanned the horizon for interesting birds. And, against the odds, I found one. There was a barn in the middle-distance and looking out of an upstairs window, was what looked to me like a Barn Owl. My eyes and optical equipment are not of the highest quality, so I just pointed out the barn to John. He too identified the object as a Barn Owl. Although this proved to be my only ornithological triumph, it was a good evening. Not only did we see many different species but I also benefited from one-to-one tuition on bird calls. I began to feel that the identification of bird song was just a very difficult rather than an impossible skill to learn. Nevertheless, a frequent topic of conversation during the walk was the Barn Owl. 'Would we see it again and might it be hunting?' Our best chance of another sighting would be on the return leg of the walk. Near the finish we would again come to within about a quarter of

a mile of the barn. However, when we arrived at this 'best spot', John became more pessimistic. Most of the grass was very short. Nevertheless, we found a good viewing position and waited, just in case. Within a minute John spotted the Barn Owl. The edges of the field had longer grass and the owl was quartering these field margins looking for prey. We were lucky enough to have very good views. We particularly admired the owl when it stopped to perch on fence posts. Best of all, while hunting, the owl dropped to the ground and we saw it emerge from the grass carrying a small rodent. The perfect end to a pleasant evening.

It was a very good sighting. However, my best Barn Owl experience occurred when I was just fourteen. Plants were my main interest but, particularly during winter, I also did quite a lot of birdwatching. And I was fortunate. There were several large gravel pits within cycling distance of my home in Reading. All were good for wildfowl. Usually I went to Theale, the nearest, only four miles away. Nevertheless, Sonning Eye was a much better site. It had the largest winter populations of the common ducks such as Pochard, Teal and Wigeon and, in the deeper water, you could usually see Smew. It was also the best place for my favourite duck, the sartorially elegant Pintail.



Pintail

Unfortunately, Sonning was difficult to get to. It was over ten miles away, and on the other side of Reading town centre. However, on this particular winter morning I decided to visit. Sonning Eye was then a working pit but on Sunday it would be closed and my trespassing

was likely to remain undetected. I chose to enter along a secluded path hidden amongst patches of marsh and wooded vegetation. The morning was cold and misty as I made my way towards the open water, where the wildfowl would be seen. Suddenly, a Barn Owl appeared out of the mist flying low and straight towards me. I stood stock-still wondering if I was about to be attacked. However, the owl simply flew noiselessly over my head. I assume that it saw me late and because of the tall vegetation present had insufficient time and space to alter course. I

now have no memory of the other birds seen on that day. Nevertheless, I still remember this, my closest, and best, encounter with a Barn Owl.

The following year, the Great Longstone Rowland evening meeting was much better attended. Again, an enjoyable and instructive time was had but no Barn Owls were seen. Nevertheless, each time I walk past that barn, I shall continue to train my binoculars on the upstairs window hoping that perhaps, one day, I will get another glimpse of my second best Barn Owl.

TARIFA SPRING MIGRATION

Tarifa is a small town at the southern tip of Spain. The African coast is easily visible from Tarifa because it's only about 9 miles away, and so it's a place where birds choose to cross when migrating to and from Africa; they can literally see the place they are heading for. Tarifa is also a place where lots of kite-surfers go, because it's almost permanently windy.

There are two periods when migration is at its peak, spring and autumn. In spring, the birds are returning to Europe, and in autumn they are leaving for Africa. When it's windy, which as I said is almost all of the time, the birds choose not to cross, because they can get blown sideways from their intended route and finish up way out to sea, so they accumulate along either coast and wait for the wind to drop before they attempt the crossing,

During autumn migration, there can be a massive buildup of birds in the Tarifa countryside, all waiting for the wind to drop, so birds are everywhere, and this is the time when most birders go. Soaring birds tend to climb high before starting the crossing, and they are then able to glide across, so in autumn they can be very high over Tarifa as they leave, and much lower by the time they reach Africa. In spring, the birds climb high over Africa, and glide towards Spain, so by the time they reach the Spanish coast, some are very low, even head-height. Unfortunately a few don't make it at all, and ditch into the sea. I've been to Tarifa a few times. When we go, we fly to Malaga and hire a car from Malaga

Cars, who have their office at the airport. It's an easy drive south to Tarifa where we've always stayed at a small Moroccan-style hotel just out of Tarifa along the Cadiz road, called Dos Mares (Two Seas). The hotel is on the beach, so it's possible to walk out along the beach and sea-watch.

I had intended to go in autumn 2018, but for various reasons we couldn't, so I took a chance and went in spring 2019. I say 'took a chance' because we only had a week, and if the wind was blowing, there might be very few birds crossing.



Booted Eagle © Doug Aston

When we arrived, it was difficult to stand up, it was so windy. There are some tall palm trees around the hotel, and these were swaying violently. They continued to sway violently for the next five days, as the wind refused to

drop. Since there was no migration, I drove to different places inland to find what I could. There are several watchpoints along the coast, and from one of them, Cazalla, which straddles a ridge above the road to Gibraltar, I watched about 10 Marsh Harriers migrating. They were all moving in the same direction along the bottom of the adjacent valley, but it was so windy, they seemed to be migrating on foot; they would fly a few metres, then walk a few, and so on, but they didn't have the will, or perhaps the energy after the sea-crossing, to get up higher. Inland, I was finding the odd Griffon Vulture and Black Kite, as well as Flamingoes, Spoonbills and Collared Pratincoles. These are nice birds to see but they were not what I'd gone for. On the penultimate day, the wind dropped a bit and I counted about 150 Black Kites as they came across, with a few Marsh Harriers and a Montagu's Harrier, but I was getting worried that not much was leaving Africa.



Short-toed Eagle © Doug Aston

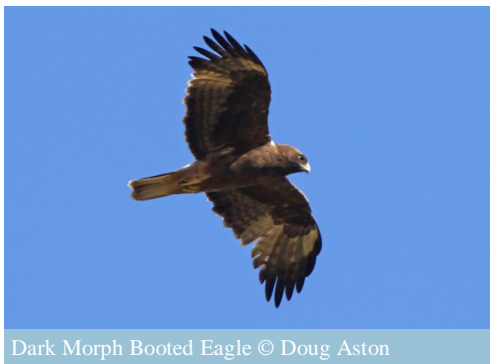
On the last morning I woke up early and the palm trees outside the hotel were dead still. As I walked out of the hotel, a Booted Eagle flew low over the hotel roof. I drove to Los Lances beach, right next to Tarifa town, where I met an English couple that I knew. We were the only people there, there were no other birders. It was an eagle day, and the migration was starting to happen. Looking towards the African coast with the bins, I could see birds steadily approaching the town. They were arriving along a wide front, probably several miles long. By the end of the day, we'd counted almost 1100 Booted Eagles, and about

150 Short-toed Eagles, hundreds of White Storks and dozens of Griffon Vultures. These were the main species, but there were other birds as well.



White Storks © Doug Aston

We were there for the last week of March. I'd chosen this week because it was bang in the middle of peak eagle migration time. This isn't guaranteed of course, but each species tends to migrate at a particular time, and the second half of March, on average, tends to be good for Kites, Eagles, Harriers, Storks and Vultures, while late April is best for Sparrowhawk and Hobby, and Honey Buzzard tend to return in May, all 'on average'. Similarly there are peak times for species during the autumn migration, Honey Buzzards leave for Africa from early August, whereas, Short-toed and Booted Eagles tend to wait until the latter half of September.



Dark Morph Booted Eagle © Doug Aston

I was lucky; without that last day when the wind dropped completely, the trip would have been very average. That's why most birders go

in autumn, because if the wind blows, the birds sit around on the Spanish side of the straits. I met a few other birders on the other days, but always in small numbers compared to the autumn. I'd go again in spring though, because a lot of the birds come in very low,

having lost height during the crossing, but as I've explained to my wife, to be certain of a successful trip, it's necessary to go for longer, for two or even three weeks, one just isn't enough.

JAYS

Jays are colourful woodland birds and like all members of the crow family are one of our most intelligent birds. They have a salmon pink body, black and white wings and tail and a sky blue patch on the wing. They have relatively short wings giving them a slow and flappy flight, providing them with much dexterity when flying through densely wooded terrain.



Eurasian Jay

Although a shy bird and only slightly larger than a Jackdaw, its nearest crow family relative, it does show a more aggressive behaviour towards other birds. Like all crows, Jays do not migrate or show seasonal movement around Britain.

They will eat most things but show a seasonal preference for songbird eggs and nestlings in the spring, and nuts, especially acorns, in the autumn and winter when they visit isolated oak trees away from their home woodland. When walking through woods, you will often hear the loud Shreck-Shreck alarm call of the Jay.



Sparrowhawk © John Wooddisse

Apart from man, the arch enemy of Jays in northern woods is the Goshawk, which is well adapted to feed on large animals and birds. However it has been known for Jays to steal Goshawk eggs. There is an area in northern Europe, where Jays have an almost playful relationship with Sparrowhawks, sparring in mock fights, but not quite getting to grips with each other. Bear in mind that female Sparrowhawks will kill Jackdaws. For a bit of entertainment just google 'Sparrowhawks and Jays'.

Did You Know...? House Sparrows have in the past been found living, and even breeding, in coal mines. Some of these intrepid birds have been found at depths of 640 metres. They likely survived on food and water provided for them by the miners but they also fed on the midges and moths that occurred at the same depth.

NORTH LEES NEST BOXES



As if monitoring the 100 or so boxes that we'd installed since 2014 wasn't enough, during 2016 I began to help out with monitoring and ringing the boxes on the North Lees estate above Hathersage. The boxes are located largely in two areas of woodland below Stannage Edge, Warren Wood and Tain Wood, with a few in farmland at North Lees Farm and a few more in woodland at Hollin Bank near the car park below Stannage Edge.

That scheme had been monitored by Flo Gordon for quite a few years. There are around 200 boxes on the estate and it was a massive job for a single person to stay on top of that.

As a result, she concentrated very much on the non-tit species using the boxes and tried to ring the occupants of as many of those boxes as possible. The species targeted were Pied Flycatchers and Redstarts, but Nuthatches also tended to get ringed.

I suggested that she should register with the B.T.O.s Nest Record Scheme and helped her to organise her data for submission via the ringing group at the end of the season.

In that first year we submitted the results from 42 boxes and strangely enough there were also 42 in 2017. Unfortunately Flo moved out of



Redstart clutch

the area before the start of the 2018 season. I was persuaded to carry on but it was clear I needed help. This came in the form of five other members of the ringing group. In 2018 we only managed to submit 38 records. I was able to get a little more organised for 2019 and with the help of two ringers and some of the Peak Park Rangers, 84 nest records were submitted at the end of 2019. We monitored 200 boxes including those on North Lees farm which had not been checked for a number of years.

It was a good year but could have been even better but for a poor spell of wet and windy weather during the first week in June.

120 pied flycatcher chicks fledged from 25 boxes used. Of these 114 were ringed. A further 20 chicks died in 3 failed boxes, discovered when we went to ring the young. Another 12 chicks died after ringing, discovered when the final box checks were made. Without that bad week we might have had 150 fledging in 2019!

Sadly redstarts also suffered from that bad June week. Only 12 birds fledged from the 6 boxes used of which 10 were ringed. One box held 2 chicks too close to fledging to ring, and it is possible that some birds had actually fledged from that box before our visit so maybe a few more than 12 actually fledged. One box was deserted at the egg laying stage with 4 eggs.

Two boxes failed with young and 13 chicks were found dead when we went to ring them.

Nuthatches occupied 5 boxes and 27 birds fledged of which 23 were ringed. Only 3 chicks died in the boxes.



Redstart fledgling



Redstart brood

The tit boxes had an unusual year with almost twice as many boxes occupied by great tits than blue tits. This also occurred at one of my other sites at Sickleholme this year. Both species had a very successful season with most fledging earlier than the migrants as is usual. We don't

try to take accurate counts of chicks in these boxes as we don't ring the birds. Having said that, we do try to make estimates and the result for recent years are detailed below.

	Boxes / fledged per box used			
	2016	2017	2018	2019
Blue Tit	11 / 4.5	9 / 5.3	16 / 5.4	16 / 5.9
Great Tit	8 / 4.5	10 / 5.5	7 / 6.3	32 / 5.7
Pied Fly.	14 / 4.6	16 / 3.2	11 / 6	25 / 4.8
Nuthatch	4 / 6.3	1 / 6	3 / 6	5 / 5.4
Redstart	5 / 3.8	5 / 4.2	3 / 7	6 / 2

STRICTLY BIRDING

What a quality start! We opened the curtains on January 1st: posing in pole position on the bird feeder was a knowingly handsome male Great Spotted Woodpecker (Ta Da!), we had our first tick. Later in the morning, a trip over to Aldi in Hull (other supermarket carparks are available), secured Waxwing on the list: we were on a roll. Thus began our Big Year 2019.

It really all began at Christmas 2017 when I received a DVD of the film 'The Big Year' starring Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson. Based on a true story, it relates the triumphs and tribulations of three Birders in the States who attempt to break the record for the highest number of birds seen in a year. It's an hilarious, moving and inspiring watch: the kernel of an idea was hatched. With retirement planned for the end of 2018, Himself and I would spend 2019 challenging ourselves to see just how many bird species we could find in the UK. To add an element of competition and incentive, five birding friends in Cheshire agreed to join us in the endeavour: thus was born the ' Birding Buddies'.



Birding Buddies © Joy Croot

During 2018 we did our research, and recced various locations and reserves where we were in with the best chance of seeing different species. Appropriate holidays were booked for throughout 2019, and we were good to go! Ticks would mean prizes! First up was the aptly named 'New Year List

Booster' guided-holiday in the Cairngorms, based in Nethy Bridge (think SpringWatch). We scooted round much of northern Scotland, with Ptarmigan, Snow Goose, Crested Tit, stonking views of Capercaillie, American Wigeon, and Black Grouse being highlights.



Capercaillie

Valuable field craft was learnt such as, never have a sandwich in one hand whilst simultaneously holding a mug of coffee in the other. When the shout of "Goshawk!" goes up, moving binoculars to eyes becomes a dangerously tricky manoeuvre and the raptor is already a dip. Nevertheless, I ended the holiday on 110: Himself had one fewer, having decided to nip into a village shop to nab a newspaper (Big Mistake) hence missing the White-tailed Eagle drifting majestically across the horizon.

Frustratingly, January ended on dips for Shorelark and a pesky Dusky Warbler along a wintry Lincolnshire coast. It took four more attempts scouring the perishingly cold beach to locate the handsome Larks.... they were finally 'in the bag' (ITB). A gorgeous, showy Great Grey Shrike in Clumber Park, on a bizarrely warm day, was February's best tick. I was now on 148 and feeling hopeful that 200 would be achievable. The BirdGuides app had become my best friend; my addiction of choice; my daily fix.

Hawfinches are elusive little tinkers but we knew of a dead cert place in Lancashire. Hotel was duly booked; reports checked ...

“yes, seen every morning”.....; long, twisty, dark, foggy drive across; early start next day. Arriving full of hope and expectation, we stared into the slowly clearing dawn gloom for a long, cold, two hours. Nothing. Not a thing. Maybe the ‘dead certs’ were indeed... well, er, dead? We retreated to the only place frustrated twitchers can, and warmed up with a Cappuccino. Obviously, the tinkers showed well the next day when we were safely 175 miles away back home. Undaunted, (a useful attribute for a Birder), we trekked over to the same site a couple of weeks later and were rewarded with good views of the elusive Hawfinch and its mates. Whilst we were on our Cheshire Birding Buddies’ territory, our friend, DS, helped us to find Ring-necked Parakeet, Willow Tit and Cattle Egret. A lifetime bogey bird of ours had always been Little Owl, but a tip-off about a breeding pair in a cemetery near Doncaster enabled us to locate them, to much rejoicing complete with victory dance. (Probably not that appropriate for a cemetery). Spring migration was now getting underway and we ticked off Ferruginous Duck (yes, I know, they can be of iffy heritage, these quackers), Spotted Crane, Long-billed Dowitcher, Wood Sandpiper, and an unusually showy and vocal Nightingale. One Sunday I was just about to put a chicken

was an omelette.

The first week of May saw us off to the Scilly Isles for a couple of weeks. Before embarking the Scillonian we bagged the long staying Glossy Ibis - an easy twitch from the Cornish road. Hoopoe, Stone Curlew, Cuckoo, Black Redstart, possible Golden Oriole, Turtle Dove were notable spots in the beautiful isles. A Garden Warbler had the honour of being my 200th bird. It’s a truism for the Scillies that you will always be on the wrong island: and so it proved when we heard news of a Lesser Yellowlegs. We had only just landed on Tresco from our base on St Mary’s: the target bird was on Bryher.

We downed our coffee and scurried back to



from the quay on Bryher



Wood Sandpiper

in the oven for dinner when news came through of a Black Tern 20 minutes away. A nanosecond of debate followed, about the merits of a dead bird versus a beautiful, bouncy-flighted stunner. Needless to say, the Tern was soon ITB and dinner that evening

the quay for the next boat to the neighbouring island. As we disembarked, vague queries were proffered regarding the returning boat to St Mary’s: equally vague replies were received. The familiar adrenaline rush, anxiety, half jogging, frantic peering around for fellow twitchers who would give a clue as to the target’s whereabouts, took over. Old Yellowlegs, was duly found and admired, but our euphoria didn’t last long as it slowly dawned that we could have a problem. It became horribly apparent that the last boat had left for St Mary’s precisely 5 minutes ago: the next boat would be tomorrow. Stranded! Sleeping under the stars even on beautiful Bryher was somehow not appealing. Thank goodness for mobile phones, complete with a reasonable phone signal for, after much negotiation on the cost, a rescue boat was arranged which whizzed us back to base in

some style.

Sort of on the way home, (no journey is ever direct these days) we pulled into a car park in Devon and there on a bush, straight in front of the car, was perched an obliging male Cirl Bunting. Tick! Unfortunately, our fellow competitor, DS, hadn't seen it, so we spent the next 3 hours trying to relocate one. How's that for altruism?!

The next few weeks featured Baikal Teal, Temminck's Stint, Serin, Great Reed Warbler (surely, one of the noisiest birds?). A foray into our garden one night, in my jimjams and slippers, was probably our most eco-friendly twitch. Silhouetted a'top an oak tree, one of 'our' resident, vociferous Tawny Owls made it on to the list.

Then a week in Suffolk produced Woodchat Shrike, Iberian Chiffchaff, Wood Lark (one of the loveliest singers), Lesser Grey Shrike, Little Owl (another, yay!), Savi's Warbler, Caspian Gull, bringing my running total to 231. But it was bird 232, an almost mythical creature especially in the north, that gave me greatest pleasure. A few very wet hours in Thetford Forest finally yielded a tiny flying barcode over my head. Yes! A Lesser Spotted Woodpecker! Himself missed it by a wing-beat.

A break in Anglesey secured us Black



Woodchat Shrike

Guillemot, along with the usual range of sea birds. One of our targets was the scarce Roseate Tern. After a bit of research we learnt it was breeding on an off-shore island: the only thing for it was to take an exhilarating Rib Ride, James Bond-style. The bird's

distinctive call enabled us to successfully locate it, albeit through sea-splattered bins. The following weeks produced Nightjar, Woodcock, White-rumped Sandpiper, Little Bustard, Marsh Warbler, Goshawk, Montague's Harrier, but one of the most memorable was two displaying male Honey Buzzards. It was my third visit to the Raptor Viewpoint in an attempt to connect with them, so their awesomely thrilling wing-clapping performance was all the more satisfying.

By August my enthusiasm for this way of



Green-winged Teal © Joy Croot

birding was starting to wane and I was almost dreading a report on BirdGuides of something scarce, with that dilemma of 'do I really want to drive 2 hours to see a Siberian Lesser-striped Do Da'. Such a report appeared mid-afternoon at the end of August. We decided to go for it, grabbed our birding gear, loaded the car and sped off to Filey. Sometimes seeing the target bird is the easy part but finding its general location can be the challenge. Such was the case here: no-one locally seemed to know where this small pond on a farm was. After driving in ever decreasing circles, by good fortune we bumped into a couple of local birders who, as the light was rapidly fading and tempers were rapidly fraying, pointed us in the right direction. Bingo! An elegant, leggy, juvenile Black-winged Stilt. What a lovely bird for my 250th. A weekend at Spurn Migfest reignited our enthusiasm with some bracingly productive sea-watching. Several empty boxes in the pelagics section of our lists were filled. A dubious bonus was that we became TV z-listed celebrities having been filmed for Look North, trudging down the

road very early in the morning on our way to the sea-watch point.

Autumn migration was now in full flow and as a warm-up for our next adventure we tracked down Little Crake, Red-necked Phalarope, American Golden Plover, all kind-of on our way to Manchester airport. Shetland in September is spectacularly splendid. Yellow-browed Warblers seemed to be leaping about in every bush; Common/Mealy Redpolls, Short-toed Lark, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Olive-backed Pipit, Red-backed Shrike, Lapland Bunting, Iceland Gull, Greenish Warbler and the ever present pirates of the sky, Bonxies, were the standout birds. But perhaps the rarest flying creature that we saw was the jaw-droppingly huge Monarch Butterfly. We were also very lucky to have several sightings of that endearing mammal, the otter. Another Big Birding Mistake is to check on BirdGuides for reports from the place you've just left. Don't do it! The frustration, agony and despair it engenders is scarcely bearable: the following couple of weeks in Shetland was off the scale for rarities. Nevertheless, I was now on 271, nip and tuck with my friend DS, Himself 258: the other four were trailing in our wake. 280 seemed like a real possibility now.

Next up was North Norfolk, accompanied by



L to R are DS, Myself and Himself © Joy Croot

our Birding Buddies. The sheer number of birds along the coast was quite a revelation and was a stark contrast to the depleted biodiversity of my home patches in NE Lincolnshire and Peak District. We twitched

the Hooded Merganser and Grey Phalarope at Titchwell en-route to Wells-next-the-Sea. Having several pairs of experienced eyes was a huge advantage and by the week's end we had well over 116 species including Firecrest, Rough-legged Buzzard, Jack Snipe, Black Redstart, Little Owl (becoming a bit like buses now!) and Ring Ouzel.

A particular target was Common Crane.



Yellow-browed Warbler © Joy Croot

Himself and I set off to the location 1.5 hours away. Having manoeuvred round a shed load of hay and negotiated two road closures, it was 2.5 hours later that we eventually arrived with light rapidly failing, and tempers well and truly frayed (deja vue BW Stilt twitch). The sun suddenly emerged from the dusky gloom, catching the silvery feathers of a quartering Barn Owl whilst three Cranes strutted, flew, called and generally did craney things in the distance. All was well with the world again! What a treat! 277.

Yet another Little Owl, peering out of a haystack, helped to make up for all those Little Owl-less years. Much more of a tricky ID was the 'mega' bird down a remote lane near Bridlington. A confused and stressed gathering of twitchers earnestly tried to morph a Common Kestrel into its Lesser cousin. Collins' app. was pored over and the finer details debated. Happily, our patience was rewarded when a couple of hours later two kestrels flew close together and the difference was immediately apparent. Relief! A solid Tick!

East Yorkshire came up trumps towards the end of autumn migration with a 1st-winter



Lesser Kestrel © Doug Aston

male Bluethroat, Pallas's Leaf Warbler and Black Brant (yes, I did tick it.. though maybe very strictly speaking, it is not a separate species...?!).

West Yorkshire was the site of our next adventure which involved a ducking and a duck. Squelching, sliding, slithering along a flooded, muddy mile-long path I heard a yell behind me. Looking round, there was Himself emerging Venus-like from a pond having slipped on the mud and completely submerged. It was a commendable imitation of the diving duck we were pursuing. Unfortunately the camera didn't survive the dunking but we really did see the smart Ring-necked Duck, honest!

December was a lean month but determination paid off. Only a few hours of

2019 remained as we sped up to Saltholme on a sunny New Year's Eve for our sixth attempt to locate a Long-eared Owl. Our luck was in with a well-concealed bird having been located by one of the wardens that morning. We came; we saw and the requisite victory



Bluethroat

dance performed! Job done. A fantastic bird made for a quality finale to a memorable year. So, scores on the doors? Himself 269; DS 280; me 283.

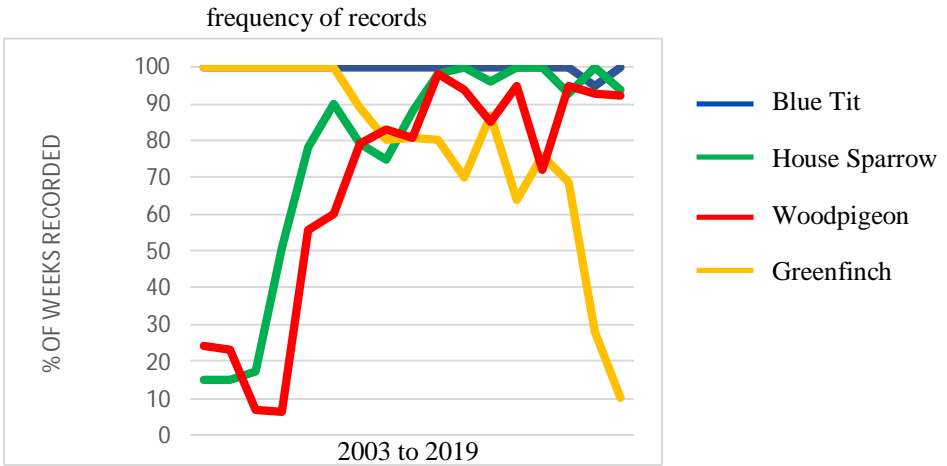
Have I enjoyed this year? Absolutely! Would I do it again....? Absolutely not..... although there's always my 'All Time UK List' to work on. Mmmm, I'm just going to click on the BirdGuides. app.....!

WINNERS AND LOSERS

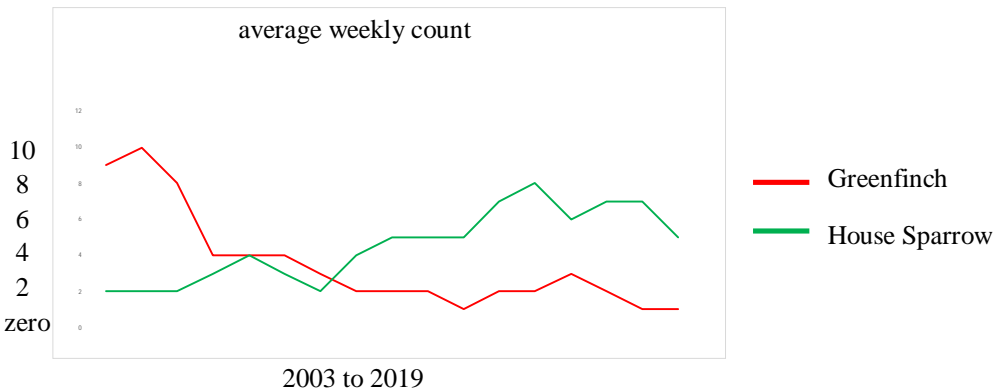
We have been participating in the B.T.O.'s Garden Bird Watch Scheme since 2002. As a result we have recorded on a weekly basis the species using our garden in Hathersage, and also the maximum weekly count for each. We have now almost 20 years of data and there have been quite a few changes. We have seen big increases in how often some birds visit and also big decreases - winners and losers.

One of the biggest losers is the Greenfinch. We used to record Greenfinch every week and there were significant numbers of them too. In the early 2000's we would see Greenfinches almost every day and certainly every week. Now we are lucky if we see them once every ten weeks. There are however a couple of significant winners - the Woodpigeon and the House Sparrow. We used to record these maybe once every 5 weeks in the early years but they are now recorded pretty much every week. Here is a chart which shows the trends for some of our birds. This shows the percentage of weeks per year in which the species were recorded. The figure would be 100% for the year if it was recorded every week. This charts the frequency of visits for four species—Blue Tit, House Sparrow, Woodpigeon and Greenfinch. The Blue Tit has been visiting every week since we started with only a slight blip when they didn't

appear for a couple of weeks in May 2018. This is the blue line at the top of the chart. The yellow line shows the steep decline for Greenfinch which started in 2009 but accelerated dramatically in 2018. The red line shows the increase in Woodpigeon visits which climbed rapidly from 2007 and is now recorded almost every week. The green line shows the growth of House Sparrow visits which started a little earlier than the increase for Woodpigeons.



In addition to the changes in the number of visits, we have also seen quite dramatic changes in the bird count. For example, in the early years we would record, on average, a count of about 9 Greenfinches during any week. Quite frequently we would see flocks of 20 or more and on one occasion in October 2004 we recorded 40. The chart below shows that the numbers of Greenfinches (the red line) began to decline earlier than the reduction in the frequency of visits. The average number of Greenfinches visiting has consistently been only 1 or 2 per week since 2010. Conversely the number of House Sparrows (the green line) has increased from 1 or 2 up to around 7 in recent years.



The reduction in Greenfinch numbers is undoubtedly the result of the effect that the Trichomonosis virus has had on these birds. This began to kill our Greenfinches from around

2006. However something else seems to have happened locally in 2018 when visits dropped quite dramatically. Quite recently we have noted a big change in the frequency of Chaffinch visits. In the first month of 2020, we recorded only a single chaffinch and that only on 2 days. No Goldfinch has yet appeared in 2020. We are hoping this doesn't presage a decline for other finches like that we have experienced with the Greenfinch.

Woodpigeon numbers have been increasing throughout the country during the last 20 years so the increase in visits for them is no surprise. The increasing numbers and visits of House Sparrows is less easy to explain. We put up a nest box for House Sparrows four or five years ago, when we began to see them more frequently so that has surely helped. They have also taken readily to 3 of our 5 Swift boxes over the last couple of years!

THE JOURNAL OF AN ASH TREE

I live in front of an old farmhouse in Edale. I'm probably about 70 years old, which is middle-aged for an Ash tree. But I've definitely been showing my age for a few years now. I am covered in moss and lichen, my branches are gradually dropping off and my leaves are very sparse. My buds don't start to open until about the end of May, so most of the year I look like a balding old man. I even have a healthy-looking 3ft Rowan sapling growing in one of my forks – a careless Fieldfare must have dropped a seed there a couple years ago.



I'm resting in winter © Rob Lorch

Over the years, all kinds of birds have perched on my boughs; from tits to Tawny Owls, Redstarts to Racing Pigeons and Spotted Flycatchers to Sparrowhawks. One Spring evening a large male Cuckoo even stopped off in my branches, "cuckooing" loudly to tell the whole valley he'd arrived.

My biggest problem, however, is that my main trunk is rotting from the inside. But some

birds find this a bonus. In April 2015 a pair of Great Spotted woodpeckers decided to make their home inside my trunk. They chipped away at my bark until they'd made a hole big



Great Spotted Woodpecker (female)

enough to squeeze inside. They then pecked out my soft rotting heart wood, spitting the chips onto the ground below until they were happy with the foot-deep cavity they'd excavated. A couple of weeks later, when their eggs had hatched, both parents were seen frantically rushing back and forth with insects and bugs for their family. Finally, about 3 weeks later, the babies flew the nest and left me in peace again.

The same pair returned in Spring 2016, preferring to create a new hole further up my trunk. They came back again in 2017 and '18, every year extending and improving this second hole, successfully raising a new brood each time.

This Spring I was expecting the same noisy tenants to start renovating their home. But on

28th February, I was surprised by a female Nuthatch gently tapping round the hole, as if testing the durability of her find. All was then quiet for a while apart from a few arguments with the returning woodpeckers, until 6th April, when both male and female nuthatches repeatedly brought tiny dollops of mud to make the entrance hole smaller. All the while they were being harassed by the much larger woodpeckers. But in the end, like David and Goliath, the tiny birds won the day and the woodpeckers went off in a huff to find a different tree. By 19th April I had a tiny circular mud hole in my side, about 3cm across. For 10 days the female was regularly fed by her partner while she sat quietly on her eggs, deep inside their hole.



Nuthatch

On 29th April, a lone female Starling arrived and started digging out the old detritus from the lower hole. She was depositing beakfuls of damp woodpecker “waste” on the bird table and garden table nearby (much to Chris and

Rob’s annoyance!). When this was done, she spent the next few days collecting and arranging young green leaves and grass in her newly created nest. Apparently this helps disinfect the old hole. She seemed to be doing this all on her own until the morning of 10th May, her constant quiet “churrs” were rewarded by the appearance of a handsome male. Together they continued to adjust the nest lining to their satisfaction, and were always first in line every morning when the mealworms are put out on the bird table.

Meanwhile, after a couple of weeks being “holed up” the female nuthatch finally emerged from her den on 7th May to help feeding the newly hatched chicks. The youngsters got bigger and noisier by the day, demanding ever more food. Finally, on 21st May, all went fairly quiet again in my trunk as the little ones fledged..... until the starling eggs hatched in early June. What a racket they made! For 3 whole weeks, the poor parents were rushed off their wings, collecting food for their greedy offspring. Towards the end of that time, they were literally fighting each other to be first at the entrance hole, beaks wide open. Then suddenly all was relatively quiet again, as one-by-one they took their maiden flight and were gone. As I write this in November, I am enjoying more tranquil times, apart from when the flocks of winter thrushes decide to take a rest in my branches from feeding. I wonder whether next Spring will be as eventful?

Did You Know?

On 21 October 2019, a Robin flew all the way from the Netherlands to the Suffolk Coast in around four hours! The individual, which weighed around 19 grams, completed its 140 mile journey just after midnight. It was fitted with a tiny 0.3g radio transmitter on the island of Heligoland, which is off the coast of Germany.

It was tracked using the Motus Wildlife Tracking System. This is an international collaborative research network using automated radio telemetry array to track such movements. The transmissions can be picked up by receiving stations that scan for signals 24 hours a day, every day. The purpose of the Motus System is to facilitate landscape-scale research and education on the ecology and conservation of migratory animals.

Not only was this the first bird to be picked up by one of these transmitters on the English coast, it was also the first ever Robin to be tracked across the North Sea. How would it be one day to have such a receiver in the valley to find out what’s passing through and from where!?

HOPE VALLEY BIRD REPORT

During 2018/2019 a total of 104/107 species 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.hvbc.org.uk.

2018 Summary

The start of this year was much wetter than usual and quite mild right up to the end of February when the aptly named 'Beast from the East' arrived. That made its presence felt in the valley by strong and freezing easterly gales and heavy snow, which continued into March. The first Red Kite of the year was over Bamford in January. The mild weather gave us several Barn Owl sightings during the first few months and they continued to be seen almost every month this year. The flashes by the Derwent in Hathersage were widespread and hosted a juvenile Mute Swan for a day or so in February, a rare visitor to the valley. A few Lapwings were there during that month too but left when the snow arrived. Three Woodcock were flushed in Horse Plantation below Stanage Edge when checking nest boxes for the spring, also in February.



Woodcock

After the snow departed during March, the Lapwings were back at the flashes and were joined by Golden Plover and Curlew despite the recurring icy blasts. Brambling were few and far between this winter but towards the end of March a male was feeding in a larch at Curbar together with Goldfinch, Redpoll and Siskin. More Woodcock were flushed in

Warren Wood above Hathersage during that month and a Peregrine was also reported over Hathersage. March continued to be cold and wet and neither Chiffchaff nor Wheatear were reported during the month, although a few Ring Ouzels arrived as usual during the month. Spring finally arrived in April this year. A Goshawk was over Hathersage in the first week and an Oystercatcher was reported at Calver Weir and another on the flashes at Hathersage a week later. Two Sand martins were at Calver mid-April - an increasingly rare sight in the valley these days. A pair of Tufted Ducks were on the pond at Laneside Farm Hope during April. A Honey Buzzard was reported at Calver during May - being harassed by pair of Common Buzzards. During June a Sedge Warbler was heard



Sedge Warbler

singing at Calver Marshes but seemed not to stay on a territory long enough to find a mate. A Black Redstart was found around Stanage Edge, also in June. In August an Oystercatcher was over Hope. A Hen Harrier was reported at Gatehouse, Hathersage, in September and there was an Osprey over Froggatt, no doubt heading south on migration. Another peregrine was over Hathersage in December and a Little Owl was also reported there. There were lots of Brambling at Longshaw and a Red Kite was over Winnats Pass during the month.

2019 Summary

Waxwings were reported in both Hathersage and Bradwell, in January and February respectively. Woodcock were flushed in Warren Wood near Hathersage also in February. A Short-eared Owl was seen hunting over Sickleholme golf course in March. There was a Yellowhammer noted at Curbar Gap in April, a bird which is becoming increasingly scarce around the valley.



Yellowhammer

Woodcock were seen roding on the first 2 spring evening walks, at Hathersage and on the Thornhill Trail. Once again a Peregrine was reported at Hathersage during April. In early May, a Merlin was at Bamford Edge during visits to monitor Ring Ouzels and a small skein of Greylag Geese was seen at Hathersage that month. A Hen Harrier was a very welcome sight during May around Hathersage. A pair of Little Grebe was on the Derwent above Calver weir in June and there was a failed breeding attempt upstream of Froggatt New Bridge. Wood Warblers were reported from several sites in June this year including Ridgewayside and Warren Wood above Hathersage as well as in Padley Gorge.

A European Bee-eater was reported over White Edge, also in June and there were five Common Crossbills in the plantation at Dennis Knoll. A Willow Tit was caught and ringed in the valley during June. On a hot day in July there were lots of flying ants on the wing which seemed to attract a significant number of Black-headed Gulls to a feast over Hathersage. A Goshawk was reported over Hathersage during August and was seen on several occasions thereafter. There were reports from Sickleholme Golf Course during August of a Hobby and a Ring-necked Parakeet but neither seemed to stay for more than a day in the valley.



Ring-necked Parakeet

A Snow Bunting was seen at Curbar Gap during the first week in November and another was around Mam Tor later in December. Brambling were reported at Longshaw throughout November and December despite the seemingly constant rain towards the end of this year. A Merlin was reported over the fields below Longshaw Lodge during December.

Did You Know? The number of Siskins that visit gardens each year depends on a couple of factors. Firstly, the BTO's Garden Bird Watch data shows that more Siskins visit gardens in years when the Sitka Spruce crop is poor. Secondly, research has also shown that Siskins are more likely to visit gardens on wet days. This is because the Alder cones that they like to feed on are closed in wet conditions. When it is dry, the cones are open, so you are less likely to see them in your garden!

Therefore, look out for these lively little finches in your gardens over the next couple of months, especially if we get some wet weather!

DERBYSHIRE TWITE PROJECT

Twite are plentiful in some parts of the world, but in the UK they are on the red list, meaning that they are considered to be 'of the highest conservation priority, needing urgent action.'

In Derbyshire there is only one location where Twite can reliably be seen, and this is more than likely due to the efforts of a few interested birders, in particular George Hudson and Peter Welch, who set up a feeding station in 2015. They chose a bridleway near Dove Holes which was lightly used by other people, but surrounded by the habitat that Twite were thought to prefer, and close to the places where they had been recorded in very small numbers in the past. They put down Nyjer seed along the track to find out if there were any birds about and if they could be encouraged to accumulate there, in the hope of finding out more about them. The Nyjer seed did the trick and numbers built to such an extent that many of the birds have been ringed, which has led to a better understanding of their movements. Some birds, and one in particular (referred to by Peter as C/M N/R which is the colour rings Carmine over Metal and Black (Niger) over Red) have bucked the trend preferring to spend summer or breed in Snowdonia and overwinter near Dove Holes, whereas most of the birds which summer or breed near Dove Holes prefer to overwinter on the east coast, with birds ringed at Dove Holes being seen in Norfolk, Suffolk, Kent and other places.

Apart from the few that overwinter at the Dove Holes site, most of the Twite seen there arrive in March and leave sometime in September or October.

Peter gave us the following account, compiled from the records of George Hudson and himself.

2003 to 2014

During this period Twite were recorded around our study area in NW Derbyshire in small numbers, twos and threes, exceptions being in July 2005 when 30+ were seen at Beelow Quarry, and a maximum of 11 were

recorded in Sept 2014.

2015

On 12th March 2015, 10 birds arrived and things became more interesting, so we established a feeding station putting down Nyjer seed which resulted in more sightings. On the 12th June a group of five came in including a juvenile begging to be fed, our first record. Small numbers continued to frequent the Nyjer until mid-August when there was a flock of 40-50 down feeding on it and also in the adjacent hay meadow. This prompted us to contact Jamie Dunning who was colour ringing Twite in the Yorkshire Pennines. He came along and during August and September successfully trapped and colour ringed 41 birds. The last bird departed by 12th October with four being reported later from the east coast at Thornham, in Norfolk.



Twite with young © Peter Welch

2016

The first arrivals in 2016 were even earlier with 7 on the 20th February including one which was colour ringed. More began to arrive from 17th March including three from the Yorkshire colony, which stayed for a few days. On 16th June, breeding was proven with three fledglings seen begging and being fed. By mid-July, 16 juveniles were present. The largest flock counted during the year was 70 with the last sighting on 12th October. Another 86 were colour ringed in 2016.

2017

The 26th January 2017 brought a surprise

report from a local walker of four Twite present (earliest ever) one of which was colour ringed, this was C/M N/R which had been seen in Snowdonia in April 2016.

We believe that with the three un-ringed it had overwintered here (we had not been putting seed down since mid-October). Others started to return from mid-March onwards with flocks of 20 being seen. More arrived in April when another 15 were ringed. During May we spent a lot of hours observing their movements in an effort to establish which birds were pairing up and on the 10th of June the first two fledglings were seen begging and being fed.



The largest flock seen was 54 on 16th Sept. and total new ringed for 2017 was 66. The female C/M N/R returned from Snowdonia on the 5th Oct and was present through to 2018 with three other colour ringed and two without rings; maybe these had also summered in Wales and we suspected that those without rings may have been the offspring of C/M N/R.

2018

The overwintering birds were present all Jan & Feb 2018 with the exception of one of the ringed ones which had gone missing. Others started to return around the middle of March with seven more being ringed on the 25th. C/M N/R was not seen between the 19th April and the 6th Sept so we assume it had spent the breeding season in Snowdonia once

again. The first juveniles were seen on the 4th June, we think that 5-6 pairs bred including one that had double brooded. The largest flock was 36 seen on 27th April, most had departed by 15th Oct but C/M N/R remained with 5 un-ringed birds until the end of the year. 44 was the total newly ringed in 2018.



Twite C/M N/R © Peter Welch

2019

On 8th Jan 2019 one of the un-ringed went missing but three out of the four others were trapped and ringed on 16th Feb.

C/M N/R was last seen on 27th March then photographed in Snowdonia on the 7th May. Eight more returned on 26th Feb with others arriving in mid-March and early April. The largest number of colour ringed birds reached 25 on the 12th April but started to reduce to single figures by month end and stayed low over the next four months. The first fledglings were seen on the 4th June. By mid-month up to 10 juveniles were seen but after that the sightings dropped. The creche that we were used to seeing in previous years was not coming to feed. By mid Sept colour ringed numbers had risen to 21 and stayed at this level until mid-Oct with most of them leaving by month end. The C/M N/R female returned on the 13th Nov and along with two other colour ringed ones was present and feeding to the end of December, this is probably the fourth time that she has been in Snowdonia and returned to Dove Holes for the winter.

ALBATROSS ENCOUNTER

Back in November 2018, we enjoyed a memorable trip touring New Zealand in a Campervan and after meandering our way around both north and south islands, we spent a few days in Kaikoura. This small town lies on the east coast of the south island about 120 miles north of Christchurch, the largest city on the island. Kaikoura is most famous for its whale watching trips where sightings of sperm whales are guaranteed. There are other seaborne activities, such as swimming with dolphins out on the ocean.

Neither of us are great swimmers so we had to give that one a miss! However one of our most unforgettable experiences of the whole holiday was an afternoon spent on a trip advertised as 'Albatross Encounter'. We discovered that our skipper was a chap named Gary Melville, who we'd met earlier in the year at the annual Bird Fair at Rutlandwater. As there were only 4 of us on the boat, we had almost individual attention throughout. We were taken out several miles to an area described as 'the Outer Hole - South Point', where Gary hung a small lure comprising about a cubic foot of fat in a mesh container over the side of the boat.

Within minutes we had our first bird taking an interest in the bait – a Wandering Albatross.



Wandering Albatross

Within the first hour we'd seen 13 Albatross of 4 species. Both Northern and Southern Royal Albatross turned up together with White-Capped and Salvin's. Many of these came in to feed within touching distance of

our boat.

Their presence soon brought in a range of



Norther Royal Albatross



Salvin's Albatross

other birds. In addition to the local gulls and terns, 5 petrel species turned up - Westland, White-chinned, Grey-faced, Cape and Giant.

Another highlight was the arrival of about ten Fairy Prion's, a superb tiny tubenose (think a miniature Fulmar) which fluttered around picking up the scraps left by the bigger birds. Time flew by as we watched the antics of this lot, before slowly returning to shore via a visit to a New Zealand Fur Seal colony hauled up on offshore reefs. On the way we had good views of Dusky Dolphins and also passed a feeding frenzy of probably over 1000 Red-billed gulls on a shoal of Kahawai. It was a brilliant afternoon!



White-chinned Petrel



Cape Petrel

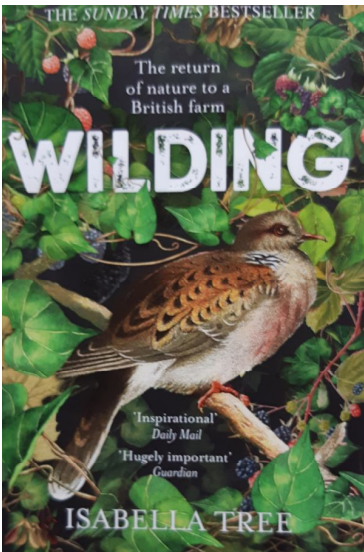


Westland Petrel



Fairy Prion

BOOK REVIEW



In August 2019 I listened to a short talk given by Isabella Tree—the author of this MUST READ book for anyone interested in the Natural History of the UK. Even to an arch-pessimist like myself it was inspirational. ‘Wilding’ tells the story of a West Sussex Estate which was rapidly heading towards bankruptcy. At the end of the 20th century it was largely an arable farm but despite concerted efforts to improve yields, the heavy clay soil there was just not suitable for modern intensive agriculture. The owners took a massive leap of faith and started to hand the 3,500 acre estate back to nature. Now widely known as the Knepp Project, over the last 20 years it has proved that our countryside CAN be restored from its current disastrous condition. It has even highlighting several misconceptions regarding the habitat needs of several of our birds and animals. Less than 50 miles from the centre of London, the estate now boasts an ecosystem and level of biodiversity way beyond the original expectations.

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Doug Aston
David Lockwood

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Crows 2. Curlew 3. T'ree 4. Raven 5. Pheasant 6. Collared Dove 7. Robin 8. Cuckoo.
9. Wren 10. Arctic Tern 11. Redshank 12. Linnets 13. Snipe 14. Barn Owl 15. An unkindness.
16. Branches 17. 600 18. Storm Petrel 19. Cormorant 20. Nuthatch.