



RSPB East Surrey Local Group

NEWSLETTER

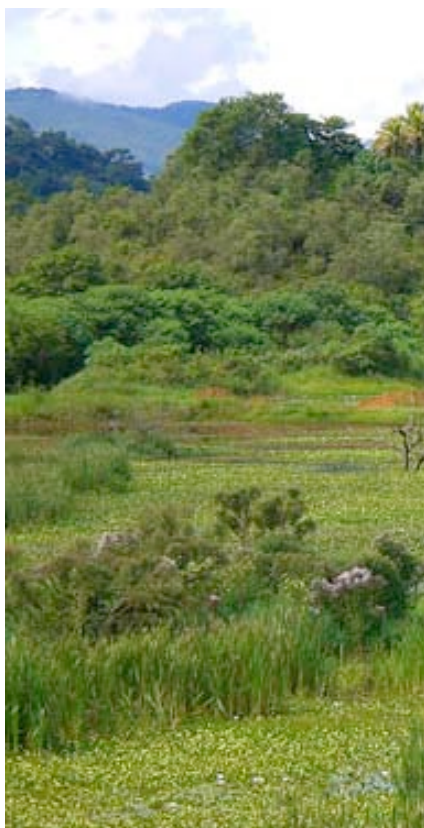
OCTOBER 2007

No 42

LEADER'S LETTER

It's that time of year again for our autumn newsletter. Thanks to you all for your valued support this year. We were able to donate £1700, split between Rainham and Cliffe reserves.

This leads nicely into the subject of Cliffe. I first birded there, both over its pools and quarries in 1953, and almost immediately after our group formed some 30 years on I enquired of the new Chief Exec (now Dame Barbara Young) as to why the RSPB hadn't acquired it!



A further 20 years on and we were there! In 3 or 4 years time I believe it will rank alongside Minsmere as a flagship reserve.

To fund things like this we need to bring in lots of new members, even if they are kicking and screaming! I'm sure they will love it just as I hope you do.

Brian Hobley

BRAZILIAN EXPERIENCE

Reserva Ecologica de Guapi Assu protects one of the last stands of tropical rainforest left in the severely depleted Atlantic Rainforest in Brazil. R.E.G.U.A. employs five Forest Rangers who continuously patrol the reserve and were recruited from local hunters. They are the first line of defence against poaching, erosion and habitat destruction.

It is home to approximately 420 species of birds of which 120 are endemic to the coastal Atlantic Rain Forest biome. Little is known about REGUA's other fauna and flora so there are projects underway to create a comprehensive inventory.

The lodge setting is absolutely stunning - located on top of a small hill directly overlooking the reserve's wetlands and the slopes of the Serra dos Orgãos mountain range.

There's nothing quite like returning after a day in the field to take a dip in the pool, view hummingbirds from the veranda or simply sit and watch the sun set over the mountains while enjoying the local Brazilian drink, Caipirinha.

Phil Jones had organised a two-week trip over to REGUA for myself, Neil and 4 other friends. We got there late at night so the first view of the reserve and the rain forest was early the next morning – and what a wonderful sight it was from my balcony at 5.30 am; with the sun rising to my left lighting up the mountains just beyond the wetland area near the Lodge.

Each day we had breakfast at 6am, and were ready to leave at 7am for a morning's birding along different trails up one or other of the aforesaid mountains. We were driven part of the way to the trail and then walked, probably not really very far, but in the heat and humidity and uphill (up-mountain, really) it felt a long way and was fairly strenuous! Fortunately, it was necessary to stop from time to time to watch the birds (which allowed some of us (me) to catch our breath!!).

Rainforest birding can be very hard work, a few birds are

brightly coloured, large or, more helpfully, stand out in the open but the smaller and/or better camouflaged species can be quite a challenge!! Thanks to our two Brazilian guides who were astonishingly good at calling in the birds, either by tape or by whistling the calls, we got some brilliant views of so many species – and it helped enormously to have such a good birder as Phil, who seemed to be able to identify a bird from a four-feather view!!! Either that or he has X-ray vision and can see through the leaves.

Finding the bird from other peoples' directions or pointing out where it is can be interesting in a place where you don't know the names of the different trees or – well, anything! It is challenging but worth it! Then, of course, there are all the different birds – it's not only not recognising the birds but not even knowing what family they belong to! I mean, when 'spot-backed antshrike' is announced in the field – what do you look for? Is it big, small? Up high in the canopy or skulking in the undergrowth? Is it brightly coloured or an LBJ (little brown job)? Then there are the similar names: antshrikes, antwrens, antvireos and antbirds, just for starters – phew! It's back to being a beginner all over again – and just as frustrating! We also all suffered a bit from 'jungle neck' – a complaint that occurs when the bird(s) are high in the canopy and, generally, directly overhead.

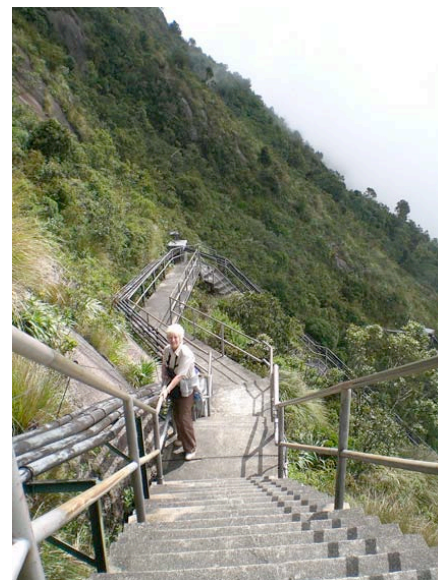
I might add that the smaller birds in Brazil come along in parties just as birds do over here. Don't get any for ages then 20 come along together – now that's a REAL challenge in identification!!



We went on two special trips off the reserve. One was to a private high altitude forest reserve where there is a chance to see higher elevation species. The reserve has a number of excellent hummingbird feeders that attract jewelled wonders such as Scale-throated Hermit, White-throated Hummingbird (see photo), Brazilian Ruby and even the incredible Plovercrest. The hummers here are very tame – even my little pocket camera managed to get some good close-up shots!

Another off-reserve trip went up another mountain. After driving up about two-thirds of its height on a cobbled road (quite an achievement to have laid that down!), we arrived at a guard-house – we should have brought passports or some identification but, fortunately, Nicholas managed to sweet-talk the guards into letting us continue up and up and up. There were steps all the way and no, I didn't count them – I was too busy 1) hanging on and 2) breathing!

I really, REALLY don't like heights and this strained me to the limit. I got to the base of the radio masts (or whatever they were) and just couldn't go any further. The knuckles were completely white by this time (see shine in photo)!



It was about 2,500 meters high; I'd managed about 2,450m before deciding enough was enough! It was quite amazing, up that high, in or above the clouds. The flora was quite different – although mostly I hadn't the faintest idea what I was looking at – even if I did think they were gorgeous!

After walking up a mountain and then down again for about 4-5 hours in sweltering heat, the ride home was welcome. Even more welcome was the refreshing swim in the pool at the Lodge just before a wonderful lunch – the ladies in the kitchen seemed intent to have us all go home a few pounds heavier despite all the exercise!!

Afternoons were our 'free' time to do with as we pleased. Swim, snooze, take photos or go for a walk around the wetland area in front of the Lodge, full of water birds – waders, wildfowl, plus passerines and raptors kept us all fascinated. We could also watch from the Lodge garden if we didn't feel like walking. The birding in the wetland area was very relaxing after a morning in the rainforest – not only was it flat but some of the bird species were more easily identifiable – herons, grebes duck etc – at least one knew where to start!

Nicholas, who runs the reserve, and his wife, Raquel, joined us some evenings for dinner, a more charming couple one couldn't hope to meet. Excellent hosts, entertaining and interesting until the croquet set came out then Nicholas took no prisoners!! The 'boys' played badminton by floodlight (well, by one large light bulb, really) they also held a walking race in the pool. Then lists were checked and the next day's itinerary planned followed by an early night.

There were so many highlights out of the 208 species of birds that I personally saw that it is quite difficult to point out one or two – but, I guess, the hummingbirds were just so amazing – they would sometimes fly up to inspect you!! Squirrels, a three-toed sloth and a dwarf porcupine were the only mammals I saw, although woolly spider monkeys were also seen by those hardy (mad?) souls who struggled up the steep and difficult Elfin Trail. We saw only two snakes - one was about 6" long and the other about twice that size – hardly worth calling 'snakes', really – and both quite harmless! One lizard, two cayman (or is it caymen??) and some tiny toads and horned frogs completed our reptile count. Phil arranged for the moth trap to be set up most nights so we had some wonderful moths to view and try to photograph before breakfast every morning. The moths and butterflies grow to huge dimensions here – bigger than some of the smaller birds!

There is plenty to occupy the botanist at REGUA, with, I'm told, tens of thousands of plant species to survey. 10% of them live in the canopy, but fortunately when the trees fall to the ground in storms they can be

studied easily. During our stay, there was a man and his wife who joined us for evening meals at the Lodge – he was an orchid specialist and had produced all the drawings for a book about them.

There are always a number of young volunteers staying in some cottages near the Lodge, who came up to join our group in the evenings. In the past, volunteers have contributed in a huge variety of ways including: mapping the Guapiaçu River for signs of River Otters, surveying tree plots in the forest, mapping the reserve boundary and trails, seed collecting and stocking the tree nursery for the reforestation program, monitoring the weather, bird photography, assisting guests, building work and writing promotional material for the reserve's ecotourism.

If you want more information about REGUA go to their website www.regua.co.uk or type in REGUA in Google search!

There are always a few surprises, though . . .



Elitta Fell

THINGS ARE LOOKING UP

At the time of writing Bough Beech is a good place to visit as two North American wader vagrants are on view; a long-billed dowitcher and a pectoral sandpiper. There is a supporting

cast of little stint and two long staying Arctic terns. On visiting the Causeway at this reservoir you may have wondered what the birders are doing in their seats sipping tea from an alfresco brew-up with accompanying smoke! They are in fact raptor watching i.e. looking for birds of prey on the ridge to the north. During the Summer sparrowhawk, kestrel, hobby, and buzzard (with 7 up together on occasions), have been sighted daily, but other good birds have been seen such as osprey, honey buzzard, marsh harrier, red kite, common crane, black stork, and great white egret. Such an impressive tally from an inland site begs the question was this just an exceptional year, or has all this 'sky watching' made a difference? We shall have to wait and see – in a chair of course - with a cup of tea or something a bit stronger with the winter not that far off!

Brian Thomas

OAP TIRED BUT STILL PUFFIN

An OAP (Old Aged Puffin) has been sighted on Sule Skerry west of Orkney, 32 years after first being ringed there. Some of the original ringers were present when their old friend was recaptured. Now at least 34 years old (it was two when initially caught), it ranks as the oldest Puffin known from 95 years of ringing in Britain and Ireland. This is only one year short of the world's oldest recorded Puffin from Iceland!

BIRD BOOKS FOR SALE

The late Ken Osborne's book bequest has now raised over £4,000 for the Society. There are still some 70 titles left, so why not e-mail the Editor for a detailed list.

EVENING MEETINGS 2008			FIELD TRIPS 2008	
JAN	Wed 9th	Chris Ward "Adventures in Argentina" The birds and mammals of this spectacular country.	Sun 13th	Harty Ferry & Shellness
FEB	Wed 13th	Dave Hassell "A Miscellany of Birds" Winter wader roosts, woodland birds and some not so common birds.	Sun 17th	Dungeness
MAR	Wed 12th	David Boag "The American Project" The wildlife and natural beauty of some of the more remote areas.	Sun 16th	Barn Elms
APR	Wed 9th	AGM – Guest speaker, Chris Corrigan. South East England RSPB Regional Director talks about the work of the region and the members' help.	Sun 27th	Pagham Harbour
MAY	Wed 14th	Carl Barimore "In the dark about owls" Field surveys and how much (or little) we know about our breeding owls.	Sun 11 th Sun 18th	Minsmere RSPB Reserve. Coach trip (Pick up 7.30 a.m. Godstone). Seaford Head (early sea watch). Meet from 6.30 a.m. at Splash Point
JUN	Wed 11th	David Darrell-Lambert "Flight identification of Raptors" Brush up your identification skills with lots of audience participation.	Fri 6th Sun 22nd	Ashdown Forest (nightjar watch). * Meet 7.30 pm Godstone, or 8 pm Forest Centre. Amberley Wildbrooks & Pulborough
JUL	Wed 9th	David Cromack "Wild West birding" Memorable images of California's coastal wildlife, Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks and Arizona's apache country.	Sun 13th	Mystery Trip
AUG	SUMMER BREAK		Sun 17th	Stodmarsh & Grove Ferry
SEP	Wed 10th	Brenda Holcombe "New Zealand and its sub-Antarctic islands" From the mainland onto Macquarie Island and the world of the albatross.	Sun 14th	Pett Level & Oare Marshes
OCT	Wed 8th	John Buckingham "Land of Ice and Fire – Iceland's natural history"	Sun 12th	Reculver & Oare Marshes
NOV	Wed 12th	Robert Canis "A Nature Photographer's Year" An insight into the work of a professional wildlife photographer.	Sun 16th	Rainham Marshes
DEC	Wed 10th	Christmas Meeting – member's tales/ photographs.	Sun 14th	Dungeness

* Half day trips



Visit our website for all the latest news:
www.eastsurreyspb.co.uk

Field trips start from Godstone Green Car Park at 8.00 am, unless otherwise stated. Half day trips – see above for time and place. For details of coach trips contact Brian Hobley (01883 625404).

Warm waterproof clothing and stout footwear should be worn. Bring a packed lunch for day trips. No dogs.

Alternations to some of the proposed venues may be necessary at the last minute.

NOTE: If going direct to venue please notify leader at least 24 hours in advance in case of changes.

Indoor Meetings will be held at the White Hart Barn, Godstone in 2008 starting at 8.00 pm.

Admission currently £2.00 for adults, £1.00 for fledglings.

Other events arranged during the year are advertised at the indoor meetings and on the website: <http://www.eastsurreyspb.co.uk>. There is no group subscription, new members and visitors are always welcome.

Group Leader: Brian Hobley (01883 625404)

Newsletter Editor: Brian Thomas (01883 623149)

If you would like to receive this publication by e-mail contact the Editor, Brian Thomas (e-mail: bj.thomas@tiscali.co.uk).

