



Grey Partridge in snow



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nature

**RSPB East Surrey
Local Group**

LEADER'S BLOG

I hope you all have had an enjoyable summer and been out and about watching the bird life in spite of the rather disappointing weather. In the coming months you will be hearing more about the RSPB's latest campaign "Futurescapes". This proposes landscape-scale conservation projects covering over 1 million hectares of land across the UK. With our partners we aim to deliver more habitats for wildlife and green spaces for people to enjoy. If you want to know more why not come to our AGM in April.

Don't forget there are plenty of things you can do in your garden to encourage birds and wildlife in general, not just by providing food and water but also selecting the right plants. Also you don't have to tidy up those seed heads and berry bushes as these can still attract birds as winter takes hold – remember the waxwing invasion last year?

As they say "every little bit helps!"

We have put together another varied programme of talks and outings next year, including our ever popular coach trip to Minsmere in May. So why not dust off those bins and join us?

John Lawrence

LOCAL BIRD SIGHTINGS

As I sit and write this milestone 50th edition at the beginning of October we are in the middle of an amazing heatwave that looks as though it could break all known records - who ever heard of 30°C at this time of the year! Not that our summer was anything to write home about but this reminds me how uncharacteristically hot it was back in mid April also, with temperatures of 27°C and bluebells almost past their best! Such weather encouraged the migrants to our area however, with 2 ring ouzels on 18th at Ashen Shaw Woldingham.



Ring ouzel (D Walker)

The next day, in the Warren Barn area, there were no fewer than 17 resplendent wheatears, a lesser whitethroat and a lone yellowhammer - sadly a very rare local breeder now. Talking of rare breeders, two willow warblers and another lesser whitethroat were singing their hearts out at North Downs Golf course the same day, but they

were only passing through. Since their reintroduction red kites have gone from strength to strength and this is evidenced by the regular sightings now in our area, with no fewer than 6 records this spring from Woldingham/Warlingham. The 29th was of course significant for the Royal wedding, but the writer was more impressed with flushing 3 grey partridges that day from a Woldingham meadow. These birds have been absent from our district for some 40 years, so let's hope they are making a comeback like the magnificent success of the Dartmoor red-backed-shrikes. Highlights in May included a Woldingham whinchat, good numbers of garden warblers, 4 red kites at Bough Beech on 15th with a red-rumped swallow there on 18th, though sadly only for a few minutes. Floral highlights included a magnificent show of white hellebore on Riddlesdown and no fewer than 60 greater butterfly orchids on one secret Woldingham bank. Another year passed without me hearing a local cuckoo but at least there were reports of one bird calling for upwards of a week in Woldingham this year. Summer was largely uneventful although your Editor had a 'first' when a common tern flew over his Warlingham garden on

June 28th. Some butterflies did well however with silver-washed fritillary particularly numerous. I failed to see purple emperor or white letter hairstreak but others did in Woldingham. Returning waders on 27th July at Bough Beech included 10 green and 3 common sandpipers: there was also a peregrine and a single dunlin together with an immature black-necked grebe. The breeding little ringed plover hatched three young, but sadly only one escaped the crows and other predators. The first returning wheatear was on Nore Hill Chelsham on 15th August and swallows could be seen flying south. The banks of marjoram and thyme here were the finest display I've ever seen.



Hoopoe Farthing Downs

It was at this time that a local rarity turned up. That exotic species the hoopoe (see photo), had been seen on Farthing Downs Coulsdon. I was lucky enough to see and photograph the bird without disturbing it, and several other group members also managed to see it during its 7 day stay. This is only my second local record following one in a Woldingham garden in 2006. Early morning heavy rain, followed by mist and persistent drizzle at this time of the year gets me out birding. These were the conditions at my local patch at Nore Hill on 23rd August. On a fence I found no less than 50 house martins, 15 swallows, several passage meadow pipits, and a beautiful

male whinchat. The majority of the martins were juvenile birds. It was so nice to see these very approachable hirundines here again in such numbers since very few now breed in the district. The 4th September proved a red letter day at Bough Beech with an impressive array of birds: curlew sandpiper, ruff, black-tailed godwit, snipe, dunlin, green and common sandpipers, green, ringed and little ringed plovers, a common tern and no less than 12 avocets happily wading close for all to see on the North lake. With the recent sad news from Cornwall of a pair of peregrines being poisoned, I was privileged to watch a juvenile of this species stooping and interacting with corvids for over 30 minutes on the evening of 11th September on the ridge above Botley Hill. I have seen this behaviour before with the young birds not succeeding or possibly even really trying to catch a prey item, but rather just learning technique and enjoying the thrill of rapid flight. It's strange but the species that would in normal circumstances be prey items all seem to know they have a novice in their presence and don't even bother to scatter far and wide! Whilst sitting on a bank watching the spectacle I was joined by 2 passage wheatears, which similarly just got on with insect gathering. Rarities were the order of the day at Weirwood reservoir on 12th September, but the possible red-necked-stint there was in fact only an interesting looking little stint. Things however got a lot more exciting there on 21st when a juvenile long-toed stint was identified. If confirmed this would be only the second UK record ever! As I finish this report it's the 4th October and with a sudden drop in temperature overnight it really feels that Autumn is upon us. This is

confirmed by the small flocks of redpolls and siskins that have returned, and it won't be long before the winter thrushes are back. My real hope however is that those beautiful northern waxwings return to my garden this winter to feast on the 'berry bounty' I have waiting for them.

Brian Thomas

WRENWORMS

I have a very guilty conscience. We had an old clematis which has died a viral death and was covered in whitefly etc and as we've only got a small garden it looked dreadful and is affecting the other plants so we cut it down at the weekend. Horror of horrors – two wrens were very, very cross at losing their food source! Didn't know we had any around although I saw one fleetingly last week. Don't think their nest was in there as they are still scurrying backwards and forwards into the bushy trees next door so hopefully I haven't destroyed their house and killed off any tiny wren babies

Trawled the web looking for what they might need for replacement food and saw they liked live mealworms. Fancied a drive so went to Pulborough Brooks reserve, looked at small tubs of wriggly things for loads of £s and decided they could ferret food for themselves, especially 'wriggle' food. Spoke to RSPB lady there who said they would eat dried ones as well but it would be better if I soaked them first.

So at some unearthly hour this morning I was soaking dried mealworms in warm water and then putting them out for the wrens. They don't seem to like feeding off the ground so I have to spread them carefully on the trellis where they were feeding before.

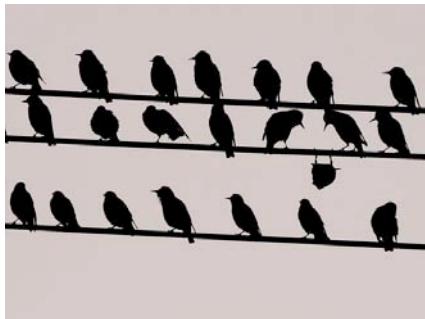
Our robin(s) have also found them so have to put out extra for

them. Wood pigeons and collared doves like the small bird food I put on the table. Starlings have broken the seed feeder all trying to fit on it at once. One magpie has worked out how to get at the fat balls

Lyn Trill

CAPTION COMPETITION

Why not try your hand at putting a suitable caption to this photo of starlings.



Please e-mail the Editor with your suggestions and the Committee will pick a winner who will receive a bottle of wine at our Christmas meeting. I'm sure there's someone out there who'll be on the right lines!

FINCHES & PARAKEETS

I have written before in these columns about the virulent disease trichomonosis, which is believed to have originated in pigeons and doves, and has hit greenfinches and chaffinches particularly badly. Large numbers of chaffinches spend the winter in Britain before taking flight to breeding grounds in Fennoscandia every spring. The latest research has revealed that the disease has now spread from our shores to mainland Europe and it looks like our migrating spring chaffinches have been responsible for its transportation! On the subject of things spreading and causing problems, I'm sure many of you will have now seen ring-necked parakeets in your area. The species is the most widely introduced parrot in the world, with breeding populations in 35 countries across five continents. They first became established in

the UK in the early 1970s - possibly from captive escapees. I first saw them at their strongholds on the Isle of Thanet, Kent, and at Esher Rugby Club, where a roost of over 6,000 birds was recorded! Things remained pretty static however until the mid 90s when their population erupted and dispersed widely. Here in Warlingham, I first noticed them at the turn of the millennia, when they possibly nested on Riddlesdown. I saw them regularly over my house for the first time in the summer of 2003, with usually 2 or 3 birds involved. Indicative of their expansion here however is a record this July of a pre roost gathering opposite my house involving more than 70 birds! If you have a roost nearby I doubt you will ever complain again about somebody's cockerel making too much noise! Like most other non indigenous species their spread could lead to significant problems. They are hole nesters and could well compete with cavity nesting native birds like stock doves and jackdaws. Let's just hope they prove to be as harmless as the introduced little owl, and not cause havoc like the grey squirrel!

Autumn is with us, and as we watch the swallows and martins depart and the winter thrushes arrive (NB first redwings flying NW over North Downs Golf course Woldingham on 3rd October), it is well worth keeping an eye out for migrant rarities like the hoopoe recently present at Coulsdon. The wryneck, a member of the woodpecker family, bred in our area up until the 1960s. It is now only a very occasional breeder in the UK but migrants passing through can still be encountered, with late August, and early September perhaps the

best time. There have been three recent records, one from Godstone and two from Warlingham, with the birds all being seen in private gardens. So watch out for a beautifully mottled brown grey bird hopping on your lawn in search of ants, and if you are lucky enough to find one please contact the writer since it is one of his favourite birds.

DAWN CHORUS WALK

Have you ever got up at the crack of dawn on a beautiful spring morning to witness the cacophony of magical sound that is the dawn chorus? I shall be leading such a trip locally on Sunday 6th May in 2012, so if you have never heard a nightingale, or would like to again, and learn the songs and calls of our native and migrant songsters do join us. The likely venue will be the Blindley Heath/Crowhurst area with details given nearer the time at our monthly meetings.

Brian Thomas

RING OUZELS

Several members have never seen this beautiful bird, which is sadly in decline. We are fortunate that a few pass through our area on migration, and stop sometimes for a few days on the local downs. The best time tends to be the last 3 weeks in April, but since their presence is unpredictable it is impractical to set a specific date now to observe them. What I would suggest however, is that anybody interested should give me their phone or e-mail details, so that I can contact them when and if the birds turn up next spring. If they do, I would either give appropriate directions or personally guide members to the birds.

Brian Thomas

EVENING MEETINGS 2012			FIELD TRIPS 2012	
JAN	Wed 11th	Ralph Todd: "Where Yeehaa meets Ole." A trip through Texas and California, including whale watching.	Sun 15th	Dungeness
FEB	Wed 8th	Brian Gallop: "One man's view of India" Covers birds, animals and various sites.	Sun 12th	Rainham
MAR	Wed 14th	Stephen Moss: "An evening without Bill Oddie". Includes video clips from this popular BBC wildlife series Stephen produced.	Sun 18th	Northwood Hill & Cliff
APR	Wed 11th	AGM - followed by "Futurescapes". A talk by Guest speaker Sam Dawes, Conservation Manager, South East Region, RSPB	Sun 15th	Selsey Bill & Church Norton
MAY	Wed 9th	Brian Nobbs: "Flights of Fancy". How birds fly explained in an extremely innovative way.	Sun 6th	Dawn Chorus Blindley Heath (meet 4.30 a.m. car park opposite Red Barn P. H. Tandridge Lane, off Ray Lane)
JUN	Wed 13th	John Buckingham: "The Wonders of Bird Migration". Increase your understanding with interesting bird facts and behaviour.	Sun 13th	New Forest (meet Godstone 7.00 a.m.)
JUL	Wed 11th	Barry Wright: "Birds of the West Indies" Enjoy a visit to these exotic islands..	Sun 27th	Minsmere Coach Trip (meet Godstone at 7.30 a.m.)
AUG	SUMMER BREAK		Fri 8 th & Fri 22nd	Ashdown Forest for nightjars—(meet 7.30 p.m. Godstone, 8 p.m. Long Car park)
SEP	Wed 12th	David Johnson: "Memoirs of an Orchid twitcher". An autobiography of one man's search for all British orchids.	Sun 17th	Stodmarsh & Grove Ferry
OCT	Wed 10th	Chris Ward: "South African Safari". Birds and animals of the Kruger and Drakensberg Mountains and much more.	Sun 15th	Mystery trip
NOV	Wed 14th	Bill Coster : "Norway and Finland". Another inimitable digital presentation featuring 5 species of forest owls.	Sun 19th	Elmley
DEC	Wed 12th	Christmas Meeting- members tales/ photographs.	Sun 16th	Stokenchurch (red kites) & Staines Reservoir
			Sun 14th	Rye Harbour
			*	Chichester Harbour Boat Trip (*Details to be announced, and given on website)
			Sun 16th	Harty Ferry & Shellness



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. Part 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.

Alterations 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 2012 starting at 8.00 pm.

Admission currently £3.00 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 visitors are always welcome.

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If you would like to receive this publication by e-mail contact the Editor, Brian Thomas (e-mail: 13bjthomas@talktalk.net). Publications sent by e-mail will be in glorious colour.



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