

Gravesend and District RSPB Local Group

The RSPB works for a healthy environment rich in birds and wildlife. It depends on the support and generosity of others to make a difference. It works closely with other bird and habitat conservation organizations.

Newsletter December 2007



Grey Heron

30 YEARS AND STILL GOING STRONG

Eighty members attended a dinner at Shorne Village Hall to celebrate the thirty years since the anniversary of the Group. Quite a few founder members and a significant number of newer members were present. During the evening Malcolm Jennings presented long service volunteers Jean Bailey and Penny Leeves with RSPB awards and Peter Heathcote gave a presentation covering events from almost the whole period. The dinner was part of a number of meetings organized this year by the committee to commemorate our anniversary. Many thanks go to David Johnson and Penny Leeves for organizing the dinner and to everyone present for such an enjoyable evening.



Indoor Meetings in January 2008

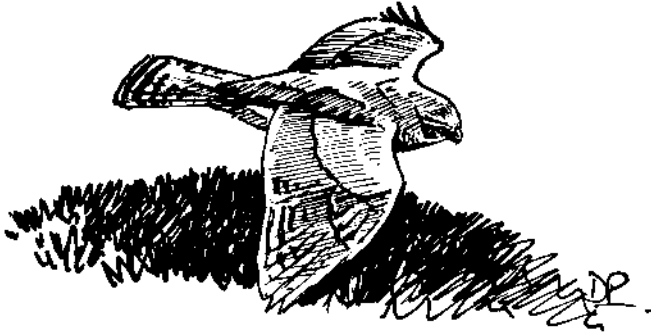
Please join us "in the warm" at our indoor meetings in January. We have an excellent programme.

David Gardner will be at St Botolph's Hall on the evening of Wednesday 9 January 2008 to give us a two part show entitled **Pattern of Islands** and **The Restless River** and *Ian Rumley-Dawson* will show slides at our afternoon meeting at Millbrook when he will give a talk on **Beyond the Horizon** on Tuesday 22 January 2008.

Big Garden Birdwatch 26 and 27 January 2008

Malcolm Jennings

Last year over 400,000 people in almost 240,000 gardens took part in the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch. I hope that you were involved in the event and you will take part this year. One hour watching birds through the kitchen window is not hard work and I am always surprised by how much I see. Actually I am not surprised because I cheat anyway. I make sure that I feed the birds well for a few days and then I only start the count when all the birds have arrived and BEFORE the sparrowhawk frightens them all to death and they hide away for the rest of the day.



Sparrowhawk

Incidentally almost all of the bird enquiries I now get as group leader are about “a buzzard in my garden that has just killed a collared dove”. Sparrowhawk numbers have fully recovered from the 1960’s pesticide problems and the poor collared doves are now their favourite prey in our gardens.

The information on bird numbers from so many gardens is very useful to the RSPB as it enables them to identify trends in bird populations. For example, the 2007 survey picked up the recent declines in house sparrow populations which led directly to conservation work being carried out.

As well as taking part in Big Garden Birdwatch I hope you will encourage your neighbours and friends to have a go and help me distribute 2000 BGBW flyers! For further information and Big Garden Birdwatch flyers please contact Malcolm on 01474 322171.

Millbrook BirdCare Weekend 9 and 10 February 2008

Malcolm Jennings

As usual we are working with Millbrook Garden Centre to put on a **BirdCare weekend**. We will be attending with our information stand on garden birds, bird food, feeders and much more. On Sunday afternoon I will be giving an illustrated talk titled **Get to Know Your Garden Birds**.

The big event for the weekend, however, is a visit by Chris Packham on Saturday afternoon. He will give a talk in the events room and judge the children’s bird art competition. This competition is being organised by Millbrook but the RSPB education team from North Kent Marshes will be running a bird art workshop for children on the Saturday morning. The team will also be “performing” their roadshow a week earlier on Saturday 2 February at Millbrook.

As I write some of the details of timings and cost are still being finalised by Millbrook. Last years’ **Feeder and Breeders** event was a big success and I am confident that this year will be a great showcase for the work of the RSPB.

Details of the events will be available in January from Malcolm at groupleader@rspbgravesend.org.uk, 01474 322171, our website, www.rspbgravesend.org.uk or from Millbrook Garden Centre 01474 331135.



Latest news on the future for RSPB Cliffe Pools

Malcolm Jennings

Cliffe Pools was purchased by the RSPB at much the same time as the marshes at Rainham. Elsewhere in this newsletter you can read about the successful outcome of the work of the RSPB at that site but what about Cliffe Pools – very much in our patch. Undoubtedly the restoration work at Cliffe was delayed by the proposals of the Government to build an airport on the Hoo peninsular and accessibility at Cliffe meant that individuals, and groups hostile to restoration, were able to make progress much more difficult. Also, the large amount of external funding provided for the work at Rainham Marsh was not available for Cliffe. Even so the Cliffe Pools reserve of today is a huge improvement on the situation only seven years ago. Breeding and wintering

birds are now protected from accidental or deliberate disturbance. Gross fly tipping and ground pollution are no longer major problems. Improvements to security, good trails and new viewpoints make visiting the area a much more pleasant experience. However, perhaps most crucially of all, a change in attitude has been affected in that the habitat and wildlife are now valued by a majority of people. Sarah Cooper, who was the lead person of the RSPB team responsible for gaining financial support at Rainham, has now been appointed to achieve the same at Cliffe Pools. A new car park should be in place this spring and funding has been found for habitat work on some of the shallow pools. If Sarah is successful in her fund raising efforts we should see more habitat restoration, new trails and hides and good educational facilities for children. Several million pounds are needed! Good luck Sarah!

News on our Website

Why not keep in touch with what's happening in the group by logging in to our refurbished web site.

You will find details of all our indoor and outdoor meetings and special events, and we have direct links to most of the outdoor locations we visit so you can check out the facilities, or see maps, and find out how to get there.

We also have a brand new "News Feed" section that can be updated with news stories and pictures directly via e-mail! You can even post your own comments on the news items (but we reserve the right to remove anything unsuitable).

So, why not check it out now at

www.rspbgravesend.org.uk - you could add it to your favourites, or even make it your home page. I challenge anyone to show me another UK site that has a picture of a juvenile malachite kingfisher on it.

Outdoor Meeting to Sandwich Bay 23 September 2007


As usual our outdoor meetings have been well attended this year and it was difficult to get the Group away from the ringing hut as



a number of birds had been caught and everyone was interested in observing the birds in the hand. However, we should have stayed at the observatory as a walk round the estate yielded less birdlife, although lots of very large caterpillars of the fox moth and a grass snake were seen. We returned to the observatory for a relax, lunch and sun (they call it raptor watching).



Alan Else



for birds
for people
for ever

RSPB Gravesend Local Group

Welcome

Welcome to the RSPB Gravesend local group website.

2007 marks the 30th anniversary for the group. To celebrate this achievement we have been running a series of special events throughout the year.

Our first event, held in February, was the Feeders and Breeder's roadshow. This proved hugely popular with all five performances fully booked. Read all about it in our April [newsletter](#).

Our series of events continued with a talk by Malcolm Jennings at the Gravesend Tourist Office on 8 September, where he talked about the history of the heronry at Northward Hill.

Our 30th anniversary dinner took place on the 6 October at Shorne Village Hall, and everyone had a great evening!

Malcolm gave another talk at the Millbrook garden centre on 23 October entitled "RSPB past, present and future".

Finally, our evening meeting on 10 October was a celebration of 30 years with presentations and recollections from our previous group leaders. The evening also saw the revival of "film night" which featured a brand new RSPB film being shown.

To learn more about the history of the group, read our latest [newsletter](#).

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New Seasalter Levels Reserve Project

On 18 September 2007, the RSPB, Canterbury City Council, Natural England and Swale Borough Council launched a partnership to create an exciting new nature reserve on Seasalter Levels. This will include the existing Seasalter Level Local Nature Reserve and an area on the adjacent Graveney Marshes known as the plotlands. It will cover over 100 hectares of grazing marsh and, in time, the RSPB hope to extent this area. There will be more information on this project in the next Newsletter.

Come and join us at RSPB Rainham Marshes Reserve

Andrew Stanton, Communications Officer

Rainham Marshes has just celebrated its first birthday. Used for 100 years as a firing range, the marshland was bought by the RSPB from the Ministry of Defence in 2000, and is one of the few ancient landscapes left in London. Our new 362 hectare nature reserve, and Site of Special Scientific Interest, is the largest remaining area of grazing marsh on the Inner Thames. We have recorded as many as 250 different species of bird here and with careful management new ones continue to arrive. Our reserve has attracted great white egret, cattle egret, spoonbill, red kite, spotted crake, red-backed shrike and many other exciting birds this year.

Now that our flagship reserve is open, you can expect a warm welcome at our award winning Visitor Centre. A cup of tea or a hot lunch, while enjoying panoramic views of the reserve and the river Thames from the comfort of the heated café, is highly recommended, either before, or after, a walk on the marshland. Boardwalks meander through reed-beds and across medieval ditches. A bird watching hide gives excellent views over the Aveley pools – which teem with wintering wildfowl through autumn and winter. Over the next 12 to 18 months we will be building two new bird watching hides, with views over enhanced wetland habitat. Work will also start on an elevated viewing platform in the woodland area and new seating and artwork will appear in a range of locations around the reserve.

We hope that Local Groups will accept our invitation to come to Rainham as part of your 2008 events programme. If you would like a brief introductory talk or guide for your walk, we can arrange that too. Whether you come as a group or on your own, we look forward to seeing you soon.



More information at www.rspb.org.uk/rainham email rainham.marshes@rspb.org.uk or phone 01708 899840.

Note: Our Group visited Rainham recently (see photo) and we were very impressed with the reserve. The RSPB have turned an environmental nightmare into a great place for wildlife and people. Rainham is open to all and has its own newsletter and events programme.

For most of us it is our nearest “full on” RSPB reserve and we have three visits planned for 2007 (*Malcolm*).

Coach Trip to Minsmere RSPB Reserve Sunday 8th June 2008

Minsmere Reserve is famous for its nesting avocets, marsh harriers, bitterns and bearded tits. There are a number of viewing hides and a good visitor centre with restaurant, shop and toilets.

The coach will leave the Woodville Halls at 8.00am and will return from Minsmere at about 5.00pm. There is ample car parking space at the Lord Street car park in Gravesend.



Tickets are £15 each and are available at Group meetings **OR**

Make cheques payable to Gravesend RSPB Local Group and send to Sally Jennings, 206 Lower Higham Rd, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 2NN (01474 322171).