

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 September 2008



During the summer, members of the group have been busy with several RSPB “people engagement” events. The Cliffe Pools Reserve Open Day was quickly followed by Cliffe Pools Children’s Safari Day and, at both of these, group volunteers helped with setting up, organising visitor car parking and running various stalls and activities.



We also organised our own events. In June we invited over 100 Gravesham cub scouts to attend a “green day” of activities at their Hope Hill campground. David James and his RSPB education team did five performances of their Roadshow and provided all of the children with RSPB “goody bags”. Gordon Allison (RSPB) and Pauline Heathcote went birdwatching while Helen Morley (Plantlife) and I went on a plant treasure hunt. Jenny Collins (Groundwork Trust) played environmental games; Lisa Selby (Gravesham Borough Council) recycled and composted waste, Julie Peeling (RSPB) spent the day catching insects and Maria Yetman and Sally Jennings raced paper frogs! The cub scouts and their leaders were very enthusiastic and the day was a great success. I would like to thank Maria Yetman for the excellent organisation on the day.

A few weeks later we organised our second “Green Day” at Holy Trinity Primary School in Gravesend. Julie Peeling put together an excellent programme of activities and the children responded very positively. You just had to be there to feel the excitement!

The RSPB are currently promoting a *Save our Birds of Prey* campaign. As part of this initiative our next indoor meeting is a special Birds of Prey Film Night. I have managed to source the RSPB film *The Eagle Odyssey* and various other film clips of birds of prey in action. This evening meeting will be a great opportunity to learn more about British birds of prey, the problems that they face and the conservation work being done by the RSPB. **Do join us.** *Malcolm Jennings*

British Birds of Prey – Film Night

Malcolm Jennings will present *The Eagle Odyssey* – an RSPB film plus film and slides of other birds of prey.

St Botolph’s Hall on Wednesday 10 September 7.45pm.

Entrance £2 (includes refreshments)

RSPB Green Cub Day

Maria Yetman

On 22 June over 100 Cubs from the Gravesham District enjoyed a sunny, activity packed, Green Day organised and sponsored by the Gravesend RSPB Local Group. It was a delight to see the children having fun as they enthusiastically explored and learnt about nature and the environment. A varied programme of activities was run by volunteers and staff from the RSPB, Plantlife, Gravesham



Borough Council and Groundwork. These included insect sweeping, bird watching, recycling and environmental games, craft, a plant and tree treasure hunt and a road show. The wildlife was obliging too and the intrepid explorers equipped with binoculars were rewarded with a variety of bird sightings, including a lovely view of a family of wrens. At the end of the day, the happy but tired Cubs left Hopehill Scout campsite clutching their RSPB goody bags, the bird feeders and origami frogs they had made. The Assistant District Commissioner for Cubs, Barbara Leadbetter, and the Cub Leaders were delighted that the Gravesend Group was able to provide the Cubs with this wonderful day. They express their thanks to all involved in planning, preparing for and running this successful event.



Group Website www.rspbgravesend.org.uk

Alan Else and Paul Yetman have been working very hard on making our group website interesting and useful. It contains details of all of our indoor and outdoor events including maps and information on how to find our meeting venues. It contains information about the group, contact information, past newsletters, links to the RSPB main website and other useful sites about birds and wildlife. Recently Alan and Paul have **added** a news page and this is used to keep group members fully informed on what is happening. Last minute changes to the programme, reminders, pictures of recent events and special requests for volunteer help are all posted on the site at “newsfeed”. Please have a look at our site. It is also very easy to subscribe to our newsfeed. As more people subscribe this part of our website will become even more useful to all of us. **Go on – have a go!**

The RSPB has just submitted a bid for £2M to Communities & Local Government (CLG), the Government department responsible for giving out Thames Gateway money. We will find out in October if we have been successful. Such bids take a huge amount of time and effort, but would represent a huge boost and would result in substantial work on the ground in early 2010. This funding bid comes as the next major step after the 'pump-priming' Heritage Lottery Fund Stage 1 grant we secured in February.

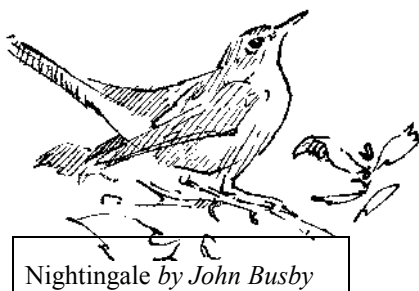
We have revised our planning application to alter the road approach to the planned car park from the end of Salt Lane. This is to increase the safety of the approach for visitors. We want to build a new road that runs separate and parallel to the current road which goes from the foot of Salt Lane to the Thameside Terminal (the old Conoco depot). We intend to put the application to Medway Council in August with works to start from October 2008.

We have received an offer of several thousand tonnes of clay, the spoil from the gas pipeline at Grain. This material will be very useful for building up one of the causeways that will form one of the planned visitor routes through the Pools. We are seeking planning permission to stockpile the material on what is known as the 'events field', north of the end of Salt Lane, until it is used. The material would be brought in by road over a ten-day period in early September.

The RSPB's senior ecologists have been to the site to assess the proposed route of the nature trail across the northern pools. We needed to be certain that the route could be made without compromising the conservation value of the pools. Work on this trail is not due to start for several years, but we need to have a funding plan in place so that this work can be part of a coherent long-term programme.

We have started the complex tendering procedure seeking consultants to deliver our Reception Building and Step 1 visitor infrastructure (nature trails, hides etc). This initial tendering will take all summer due to our obligation to follow strict European procedures.

Cliffe Creek is very important in the management of the Pools as it allows us the intake of river water through a sluice, which pushes water around the Pools and back out of the sluice. This allows us to maintain the salinity and water levels of the Pools, and hence its wildlife. However, Cliffe Creek is silting up, which is threatening the long-term viability of the existing sluice, so we are in discussions with the Environment Agency with a view to replacing the sluice with one that will be functional in the long-term.

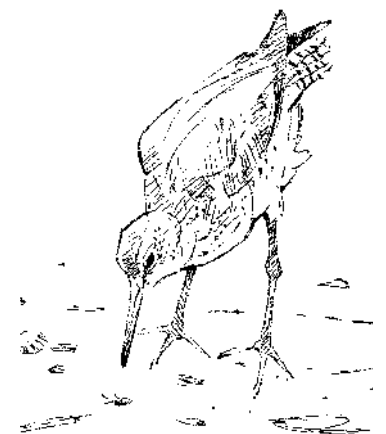


Nightingale by John Busby

The last breeding bird survey was completed in early June and the highlight has been a superb year for nightingales with 16 birds singing their hearts out.

The new tern rafts sparked some initial interest from a pair of common terns but these soon left to join a much larger colony on Hidden Pool. Unfortunately, these dispersed to other places, dashing hopes of a rejuvenated colony.

A black-headed gull colony established itself on Conoco pool. A small affair by gull standards, but still around 10 nests of which three had young. 15 pairs of lapwing and 35 pairs of redshank bred on the reserve.



Common Redshank by John Busby

We experienced a rather dry end to the winter and while rainfall was regular during the early spring, levels on the marshes were still dropping steadily until the last week in May, when almost 3.5 inches of rain fell, leaving the marshes wetter than they had been during the winter. This has meant that there has been plenty of wet areas available for feeding wader chicks. So, rather than having all the chicks concentrated around a few water bodies, with increased risk of predation, the young have been scattered all over the marsh with the result that fledging success has been higher than of late. We spent the late winter period excavating further wet features at Northward Hill, ditches were connected and rills were excavated, allowing water to be moved directly over a much larger area. All this earth-moving resulted in an increase in the number of breeding birds. This was a major boost to the reserve and reflects the hard work put in by staff over the last couple of years.

The woodland work programme came to an end for another season, with a total of 0.5 hectares of scrub management and 250 metres of ride widening carried out. The increased emphasis on our declining woodland bird populations has meant a re-evaluation of our woodland work at Northward Hill, with scrub and ride management very much “back on the agenda”. Our work party volunteers will doubtless be overjoyed to hear that, not only will there be more scrub coppicing and ride widening next winter, but we will be having another concentrated effort on sycamore clearance!



Coach Trip to RSPB Pulborough Brooks on Sunday 2nd November 2008

Set in the beautiful Arun Valley, with superb views across wet meadows & fields to the South Downs, Pulborough Brooks is a haven for wildlife. There are a number of viewing hides along the main trail and the excellent visitor centre has shop and tea room.

The coach will leave the Woodville Halls at 8.30am, and depart from the reserve at about 4.00pm. There is ample car parking at Lord Street car park in Gravesend.

Tickets are £12 for adults and £5 for children and are available at meetings or from:

Sally Jennings, 206 Lower Higham Rd, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 2NN
Tel. 01474 322171

Make cheques payable to 'Gravesend RSPB Local Group'. Please send SAE for return of tickets.

Indoor meeting

A Glimpse of Kentish Wildlife

Pauline and Peter Heathcote will take us on a tour of Kent to some of their favourite sites. Lots of birds, butterflies, moths, mammals (including dormice – see picture) and other aspects of natural history.

Millbrook Garden Centre on Tuesday 23 September at 2pm
Entrance £2 (includes refreshments)

