

Gravesend and District RSPB Local Group



- nature's voice

Newsletter September 2009

As Group Leader I am often contacted by members of the public about “wildlife problems”. In spring the usual concerns are about nesting birds and, in particular, nestlings found in the garden. These kind of enquiries are easy to deal with and the RSPB even provide group leaders with guidance notes. In more difficult cases I can always pass people on to the RSPB Wildlife Enquiries unit at the Lodge. I occasionally also receive calls related to wildlife crime. This may concern the cutting of trees, building work that will disturb (and kill) nesting birds and many other problems. I know from my own experience that I have been very angry when, having been watching and enjoying the development of a nest of birds in a public space, I find workmen damaging the site. But what do you do? On two occasions I have tried to pursue a case with the local police, the local council, and police wildlife officers. I have never got very far and, therefore, find it difficult to advise others. There is a Wildlife Crime unit at the Lodge and that should be the first step. I am very pleased to report that the RSPB recognise that wildlife crime is not being addressed in England and I fully support the RSPB initiative on Wildlife Crime as detailed in the later article in this newsletter.

Malcolm Jennings

On a completely different note you may (or not!) be pleased to learn that I have been nominated for a RSPB President's Award and that I will receive it in October at the RSPB AGM. From *Birds* magazine I learn that Kate Humble will be the new President. Sometimes dreams do come true! It is, of course, a great honour for me to receive such an award. I do know what I have done – but I also know that I have leaned on a large number of people to do it! It is always thus – we can be pleased with what we have achieved together.

Malcolm Jennings

Families flock to North Kent RSPB Nature Reserve as new Car-park opens



Record numbers of people came to RSPB Cliffe Pools for the opening of the new visitor facilities by the Mayor of Medway, councillor David Royle. The car-park and new visitor facilities were made possible thanks to help for funding from The South-East England Development Agency, The Douglas Glanfield Memorial Trust, The Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation and support from the local Council.

The opening of the new car-park was scheduled to coincide with the RSPB's **Annual Kids Safari Fun day** and over 2000 people turned out to take part in the event.

The RSPB laid on free activities for children, ranging from safari trips and rainforest puppet shows to making kites and bird feeders and the Mayor, local dignitaries and the Leader of the Medway Council helped in the search for bugs and insects.

The RSPB's publicity officer, Damian Fleming, was delighted with the huge turnout. He said *one of the main goals of the RSPB is to help the next generation to connect with nature. To have so many families and kids on the reserve was amazing. It was also great to see so many people visiting Cliffe for the first time and everyone kept telling me that they would come back. Having a new secure car-park makes it much easier for people to park their cars and enjoy one of the many walks around the reserve or out to the river Thames*".



The new car park is open daily from 8.30am to 5pm and parking is free. It can be found just outside the village of Cliffe at the end of Salt Lane. A number of way marked trails around the pools and out to the Thames have also been developed as part of the site's redevelopment

The RSPB will be installing new site interpretation boards at strategic points around the reserve and will be increasing staff presence onsite.

Local Group AGM 13 May 2009

Our AGM was a well attended meeting and provided an opportunity for members to hear about the group finances and some aspects of our work. Neville, our treasurer, provided details of the group income and expenditure. A donation of £741 was made to the RSPB to go towards the 'Birds of Prey Campaign'. Malcolm then made a presentation of long service volunteer awards to Peter Heathcote, Joyce Fletcher and Sandy Roman. Joyce had decided to stand down from the committee but all of the other committee members were re-elected (a copy of the minutes of the AGM and the accounts can be found on our website).

www.rspbgravesend.org.uk).

Malcolm had invited Damian Fleming to the AGM. Damian is the new RSPB Communications Officer at North Kent Marshes. He explained his role at the reserve and told us about some of the latest developments at Cliffe Pools.

Malcolm then gave a presentation showing how Group members have been involved in a wide variety of activities this year. The talk was illustrated with many excellent photos, most taken by Group members.

After the interval David James and Julie Peeling explained some aspects of the education programme at North Kent Marshes. Their talk was enlivened by live performances from their roadshows for children. Perhaps the most memorable routine being "how many wrens can you get in a nest box." *Sadly the behaviour of some of the audience left much to be desired and David did have to acknowledge at the end that children were never as much of a problem as we had been!*

A completely "one – off" meeting that was enjoyed by all.

News from the North Kent Marshes

The education team at Northward Hill have just been awarded a quality badge, the first benchmark of teaching standards for outside classroom learning. This is fantastic news for the North Kent Marshes team and is recognition of the great educational experience we know we have been providing for schools and other youth organizations. The educational programme has gone from strength to strength and we are currently converting our barn at Northward Hill to a teaching centre – and there are acres of fantastic habitat right outside where children can come close to nature.

RSPB staff

Super-Duper Website

The Gravesend Group now has a new-look website thanks to Alan Else and Sam and Paul Yetman. We have a calendar of events on our outdoor meetings page with directions to all of the meeting places. We also have a

Gallery page (with archive pages) that will keep you informed of what group members are doing and copies of our newsletters. Remember too that you can subscribe to a news feed that will let you know about future events.

Try www.rspbgravesend.org.uk (which can be accessed for free at any KCC library).

Birding at Knole Park

In June the Tuesday morning group visited Knole Park near Sevenoaks. A large number of members turned up only to find that Malcolm, the walk leader, had never visited Knole Park from the designated meeting place. Fortunately Clifford knew the way, and with his superb navigational skills, led the group into and around Knole Park. A male singing yellowhammer was soon found but the real specialities of Knole Park, redstart and tree pipit, proved very difficult to find. Dragonflies and butterflies enlivened the walk and a Japanese sitka deer joined in the fun. (Everyone on the walk now knows that the scent glands on the hind leg distinguish sitka from the more numerous fallow deer!) Just as self doubt was beginning to trouble Malcolm, we found redstart, tree pipit, and treecreeper all within a few yards of each other. Malcolm also saw



spotted flycatcher but no one would believe him. A really beautiful sunny walk finished off with a picnic at Godden Green.

Conservationists call for shake up of wildlife policing

Conservationists are calling for a fundamental review of the way crimes against wildlife are dealt with in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts say the lack of national standards has led to an inconsistent and often poor response to wildlife crime from the police.

At present there is:

- No national agreement on what counts as a wildlife crime
- No minimum standard for investigating wildlife crime
- No requirement to send records of wildlife crimes to the Home Office as part of the police force official statistics

This, together with a chronic shortage of wildlife crime officers, means that wildlife crimes are given low priority and the way reports are dealt with often depends on individual officers. As a result, those responsible for crimes are able to break the law with little fear of detection. Following public outcry at the poisoning of a golden eagle in 2007, the Scottish Government ordered a thorough review of wildlife crime policing. This recommended minimum national standards for investigating wildlife crimes and the appointment of specialist officers and prosecutors.

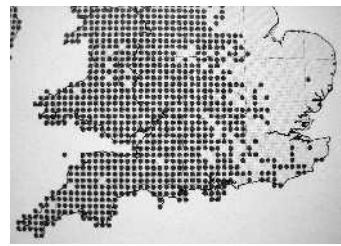
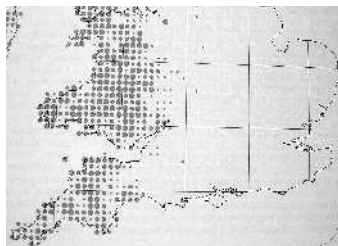
RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts are now calling for a similar ‘Thematic Review’ in the rest of the UK, to be carried out by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Large Predators in Kent – The Raven

Over the last ten years there has been an increase in the numbers of birds of prey seen in Kent. Common buzzards, red kites, ospreys, peregrines and even occasional goshawks are now seen in the county with increasing regularity. Some are now nesting in Kent. The increase is attributable to the work of the RSPB and

other conservation bodies, reintroductions, the help of the farming community, the decrease in the number of gamekeepers and to British and European Union law. The expansion of the common buzzard, from its strongholds on the western and northern sides of Britain, have been well documented and there is probably up to 100 pairs currently breeding in Kent. A journey along the A2/M2 and A20/M20 will invariably result in a sighting. Watch out for corvids chasing a larger bird in the sky.

In recent years another large bird, the Raven, has been seen in Kent in small numbers. This year a pair successfully fledged two youngsters on the cliffs near Dover. This has taken most birdwatchers by surprise as, until only a couple of years ago, it was very difficult to have a record of a raven accepted in Kent, and they were described as very rare in the recent Bird Reports published by the Kent Ornithological Society.



The maps, showing the winter distribution of the raven, were published by the British Trust for Ornithology in 1986 and 2009. These show a dramatic increase in the range (winter distribution is very similar to breeding distribution) of this, our largest passerine.

Records over the last twenty or so years have shown a dramatic reduction in both numbers and species of the passerine birds in Britain. The RSPB magazine *Birds* and most conservation related magazines and books have described reasons for this and there are many initiatives to try to rectify the situation. The main problems are related to the reduction in habitat and food throughout the breeding, migration and wintering periods and the chemicals that are used in the fields. As we know the problems are not specific to birds and numbers of many insects, animals and flowers are declining dramatically.

Peter Heathcote

Has anyone heard a Nightingale this year?

A recent study has shown that the numbers of nightingales singing in Britain has declined by 95% in the 30 years between 1967 and 1999. It is speculated that the causes are likely to include changes in woodland management during this period. Nightingales continue to nest at Northward Hill thanks to the efforts of the RSPB.

Coach Trip to the London Wetland Centre on Sunday 22 November 2009

Visit a wildlife reserve 25 minutes from central London! Run by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, it supports a wealth of wildlife, including kingfishers, bitterns, water voles and migratory birds. There are hides, trails and a visitor centre serving hot and cold food. A great way to spend a November day....

Tickets: Wildfowl & Wetland members £12 Non-WWT members £18

(WWT members please take membership cards)

We leave Woodville Halls at **8.30am and return about 6pm**

Please make cheques payable to; Gravesend RSPB Local Group and send to Sally Jennings, 206 Lower Higham Rd, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 2NN (01474 322171), enclosing SAE for tickets please.

Indoor Meetings in September

Don't forget to come to our indoor meetings which start in September after the summer break.

On **Wednesday evening 9 September** Barry Wright gives us another entertaining talk. This time it is his **Adventures in Ethiopia**. Barry always shows superb slides of his trips and highlights some of the unexpected events that he encountered during his search for birds. St Botolph's Church Hall 7-45 to 10-00pm.

On **Tuesday afternoon 22 September** Ben Sweeney, warden, will give a talk **Plantlife at Ranscombe Farm**. He will tell us about the development, management and some of the rare flowers that grow on this fairly local nature reserve. Millbrook Garden Centre 2-00 to 4.00pm.

Not to be missed!